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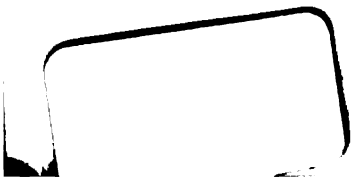
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SHE WHO WAS HELENA CASS

LAWRENCE RISING

KD12613



**SHE WHO WAS
HELENA CASS**

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**BY
LAWRENCE RISING**

NEW  **YORK**
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

KD12613



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**TO
ALICE**



**SHE WHO WAS
HELENA CASS**



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BOOK I

I

WHO was she? It was she!

As many as eight or ten times, Jay Sefton mused, he had thought he had seen her, but always before he had been mistaken. Sometimes she had been leaving a restaurant or an hotel, or in the act of alighting from a car. Once it had been something in the carriage of a woman's shoulders; another time it was the quick, bird-like movement of the head; or again the impatient step of a girl crossing the street; it might be the way a woman propelled herself forward against the crowd; or even the cast of features glimpsed through the disfiguring all-over pattern of her veil.

Each time he had felt the moment of tense excitement which communicated itself to every nerve. He increased his speed or slackened it as the case might be so that he continued abreast of her. But a second glance was always enough to prove his mistake. And following that he experienced an unreasoning anger directed against the woman who had decoyed his hopes.

The reactions were so regular, so inevitable as to have become almost formulæ, wherein each sensation could be tabulated. But once his indignation left him it was suc-

ceeded by a disgust of self, a desire to chuck up everything and get away. New York was unreal. It was a city of ghosts dancing together after the music had ceased. It was like a cinema seen upside down; thousands of silhouettes passed, repassed and finally became merged.

To-day his feelings bore little relation to the abasement of past mistakes. New York was merely a glittering background against which his drama was being enacted.

Seeing an empty motorcab passing, he had run into the street amid the rush of vehicles and leapt upon the running-board.

"Overtake the yellow car ahead," he called to the chauffeur, "and I'll double your fare.

After Mr. Sefton had sprung inside he remained with his hand on the door, his quickened breath betraying high tension. His eyes followed the yellow car ahead which was nosing its way through the congestion of afternoon traffic as though it knew it had been sighted and was looking for escape. He swore under his breath when a car passed before them blocking his vision. Then he called out:

"What's the matter with your engine? Can't you make it go?"

Still the chauffeur gave no response, but inch by inch they ate up the intervening space and he saw they were gaining on the car ahead. If only they weren't held in a block he could overtake the occupant.

At the thought he felt an excitement hammering in his temples. Was it to come true at last, this search of over three years? He was conscious of a sudden feeling of self-commiseration; he had been curiously faithful; for during three years he had not thought of anyone else, seriously. . . .

He had planned so often what he would do when he found her. For at no time had there been any doubt in his mind but that some day, somewhere, they would confront each other. And now that the moment seemed imminent all his rehearsed effects deserted him. He would want to make himself instantly known to her. He would call her by name.

They were gaining on the car steadily. This time he could not be eluded.

It was an afternoon of early September, warm, seasonable, not yet giving a hint of the delayed autumn which would recall the city's decorative element waiting at the shore for the blistering pavements to be permanently cooled. Among the myriads of hurrying creatures on the Avenue, intense, humourless, swarming like a tumbled ant hill, there appeared no change. The removal of that small community of the socially eminent seemed insufficient to explain the want of distinction which characterized the present throng. But already the sight of a woman expertly dressed, colour and line proclaiming her one of that small group whose most casual raiment standardize fashions, was sufficiently rare to catch the glance of the trained observer.

It was indeed just this quality which had held the attention of Jay Sefton. The yellow car he had not recognized nor the pseudo-livery of chauffeur and footman, but the glimpse of the woman in the tonneau had gripped him. She was not alone, but he had not noticed if her companion were a man or a woman before deciding pursuit. In a moment he realized that since she had concealed herself with such amazing success, to make himself known to her meant only to lose her once again.

Instead he must caution patience. He would follow her unobtrusively, persistently; see where the car went; discover where she was living; find out under what name she had made positive her disguise. Then when all of her pretences had been penetrated and the primary facts of her life were known to him he would appear before her; with the threat of exposure she was not likely to refuse him. After all, why should she refuse him? He was a personable young man; he possessed means and no outstanding vices.

He had reached this point in his reasoning when he saw that the traffic ahead had been suddenly halted above 34th Street. The yellow car was at a standstill while the cross-

town traffic was allowed to pass. To the right of her car was a small space and into this the chauffeur now directed his motor. The fellow's calculation proved exact even to a matter of half inches, as its shabby mud guards failed even to graze its neighbour as they came to a standstill alongside.

She was seated in an angle of the car, her slippered feet crossed on a small fawn-coloured hassock which matched the whipcord upholstery. She had raised a small black fan, as a shield against the glare which hid her features. She was wearing a dress of biscuit-coloured broadcloth, girdled with Oriental striped silk. In one hand she held a pair of gloves and a small moiré bag, with gold clasps, and on the third finger of this hand hung a mammoth, lozenge-shaped sapphire, surrounded with diamonds which glittered like white fire in the sunlight.

Her companion was a foreigner; a type that had found continued residence in America better suited to his purposes than to be at home. He had frequently seen him before in the night life of the city without knowing who he was. His clothes were unmistakably Continental, his mustache ends waxed. He was speaking French and yet Sefton felt the man had lived enough years in this country to have attained a fluent English. He was undoubtedly one of those persons who, the longer they remain on American soil, grow inversely more and more foreign.

Her companion, noticing his observer's scrutiny, appeared to tell the lady. But before Sefton had time to draw back she had lowered her fan and they looked into each other's eyes.

The woman was a stranger to him! He had never seen her before!

Her face was clear, her eyes grey. His inspection of her had not caused her even an inconsiderable annoyance. As he watched he saw her lips part ever so slightly with the suggestion of a smile; her smile was provocative yet not without derision.

The crosstown vehicles had now gone by and traffic on

the Avenue was resumed. The car, once more in motion, passed him and flashed ahead. But Sefton had not acknowledged what was evidently intended as quasi-recognition. He was in no mood to seek any sordid flirtation. The woman's apparent accessibility only heightened his disgust. It was a profanation that he could have mistaken this woman for the one of whom he was in search.

The chauffeur had turned in his seat for directions:

"Now where?"

"Go anywhere; go to ——!"

He pronounced the word under his breath and the driver, as though complying, continued down Fifth Avenue. At 23rd Street he crossed and made his way up on the East side. While the scene shifted past him in the afternoon sunlight he continued the same futile speculations which had long been at home in his mind. He was pursuing a shadow. He was allowing substance to escape while he continued his phantom quest.

"I'm a fool," he told himself.

And even while he knew the truth of his words he knew he was not cured.

"It's damned idiocy to expect to see her here."

He was not the only man who had known her. Had she been in the car that had passed him she would have attracted more attention than a visiting royalty or a celebrity of the hour. No one would have failed to recognise her.

There was no paper in America which had not printed her picture. And her name had appeared for days across the heads of afternoon sheets. It had been the subject of extra editions. It had been seen on hoardings and covered bulletin boards replacing European cables. Her name had been hawked on the street corner in a way to give hope to her friends that at last her identity had been established.

Two years following her disappearance someone had claimed to have seen her in San Francisco. A few months later it was Kansas City. And during the past winter it had been Detroit. But these highly coloured accounts of

her discovery, made public in the afternoon, always proved by morning to be fabrication or hearsay. And each report put under investigation dwindled away to nothing.

People who had known her claimed they had caught a glimpse of her at Biarritz and Paris. But when they spoke to her she vanished. Detectives, however, discredited these encounters. Of the hordes of young women who maintained that they were she, each in turn was afterwards proven to be a notoriety-seeker or some unaccountable vagrant mind the preposterousness of whose assumption was usually self-evident.

The capitals of Europe were all acquainted with the same photograph. And the reward announced by her father for her discovery had never been withdrawn, although there was no longer any talk of that. The subject was merely deemed hopeless and discontinued. The photograph taken by Mishkin something over three years ago had been slightly retouched; perhaps she had not been quite as pretty as the portrait depicted; but Sefton liked best to think of her so.

Wide, humid eyes, sparkling irresistibly, as though they had just conceived a fresh prank, beneath a broad brow, the entire face framed in masses of thick black hair. The mouth was a little large, but the chin was firm above the splendid pillar of her throat, full and strong as ivory. It was a face that arrested attention because of its arrogant, youthful confidence, its audacity, its resourcefulness. It was not the face of one easily daunted. She had not been the girl to succumb to the blandishments of any trickster. Her entire attitude toward life had been humourous, defiant, unafraid. And yet already people had taken to saying:

"I don't suppose we'll ever know what became of her."

What had become of her?

If she were still alive beyond doubt someone would have seen her before now. That was always the conclusion he returned to as it was always his starting point.

Why did Sefton allow her to disturb his life? He had not

been engaged to her. He had not even realised he was in love with her until her disappearance. They had been friends—but nothing more. He had danced with her. And how well she danced! What a sense of fun she possessed! Her humour had been keen, her irony caustic! Behind them had been sheer joy in living and high spirits.

The memory of her had become a fetish to him. She was an incubus, not only the subject of his unhappiness but an obstacle to peace. He told himself the result of his infatuation was already incalculable. He had sacrificed three years of his life to a wraith. She could no longer be considered a real person. And yet her name conjured up a personality to the minds of millions of people. One had only to pronounce it to obtain instant attention.

Poor Helena Cass. Why did it have to be she? . . .

II

IN passing his club, Sefton signalled the chauffeur to stop, sprang out, paid him and entered. He did not surrender his hat to the liveried servant in the lower hall, but, following a mannerism of the club, made his way upstairs still wearing it. Many of the members were not yet back in town, and an air of settled melancholy brooded over the empty lounge and vestibule.

Being one of the few literary members, Jay Sefton mounted to an upper floor, confident of finding the library deserted. In the half-shaded light of the large, untenanted room he dropped into one of the capacious easy-chairs and threw a leg over the upholstered arm. This trick characterized absorbed thought, while he expelled cylinders of smoke through inflated nostrils. He remained in deep pre-occupation, occasionally producing a gold cigarette-case, the gift of his publisher, lighting a fresh cigarette from the stub of the last, but otherwise his immobility continued undisturbed. The afternoon waned, but he did not rouse himself.

Sefton's success as a novelist had been somewhat in the nature of a foregone conclusion. His "arrival" the winter past had effected a succession of rings on the placid surface of the literary world that had caused a distinct ripple on the shore. Yet in spite of it he now found himself beset with unexpected difficulties. After the preparatory years spent at Sandhurst, the urge of his own country had proved too strong and he had left England, where he had lived as a boy, and returned to America. A feeling of sentiment had made him wish to claim the same alma mater which had been successive links in the life of his father and several generations of Seftons before him.

At college he had shown just those brilliant qualities

which were likely to electrify a class-room and in a course of literary construction his fellow students felt they were listening to the work of a man who would become one of the great men of letters of his day. It was therefore a distinct disappointment that, following post-graduate work, when his first novel appeared it caused scarcely a murmur. A few reviews spoke of it giving "distinct promise," but the work itself was self-conscious, and the theme not one to rouse enthusiasm. A year later the second book appeared and while this was achieved with a more mature and finished artistry again the subject was one in itself to preclude popularity.

It was not until the appearance of the third book that the name of Jay Sefton became universally known. The success of "Unexposed" was like no other success since "Trilby"; it combined an extraordinary theme, human, compelling, with a vigour of style and a forceful expression whereby the other books of the season seemed a mere fluidity. The success of "Unexposed" made him eager to attack a fourth book, and a theme which had long interested him began to elaborate itself in his brain. It was after "Unexposed" had passed through its fourth edition that he one day paid a visit to his publisher to outline to him the structure of the new book. But this was received with almost immediate rebuff.

"Don't go to work too rapidly, Mr. Sefton," he cautioned. "You have gained an immense public. Don't lose it. This idea would disappoint the readers of 'Unexposed.' You have been given a responsibility which must be fulfilled. Your two earlier books were almost as fine pieces of work as your last. The difference in their popularity is that your last dealt with a very human situation and your first two didn't. Write this book you have planned, later on, just for your own pleasure. And in the meantime be on the lookout for a subject which will duplicate "Unexposed."

And so for the past six months Jay Sefton had resigned himself to looking for a human view of life to satisfy nearly a million readers, not knowing that his search in

itself was likely to defeat all plans of its fulfilment. Ideas had come flocking to him, one after another, each to be weighed, considered and then be discarded as not interesting to his public.

It was not until a few weeks ago that the story of Helena Cass had suggested a theme ready to his hand. The complexities which shrouded his subject only increased tenfold his own interest. He would write of a young man who became enamoured with a young woman after she had been lost to the world and her friends. So great would his affection become that it gradually usurped all other interests, and he resigned his business and began a systematic search for her. Her own parents and friends would come under the microscope of his inspection, until out of the most incomprehensible details he was able to adduce data which finally led to her discovery, and the suppressed reasons which had brought about her misadventure. In the first flare-up of the thought Sefton decided that he would make use of his imagination to solve the three years' quandary, but later he was determined to discover Miss Cass herself, and use those facts as a nucleus for his story.

He felt his face flush now at the ugliness of the idea, as he regarded it impartially. What could be more tasteless than making use of a celebrated case as a means of fostering his own career? His need to discover what had happened to the girl was the response of a more personal group of imperatives than the mere urge of "copy." There was no denying the emotion now that he surrendered to it. He had been attracted to several women in the past, though such claims had not been lasting, but this present one was not to be put aside. He was in love. . . . He admitted shamefacedly that it was his failure to experience its individual poignancy before that had been found lacking in his work. . . . That was what his reputed literary "coldness" amounted to. . . .

Sefton stretched his long legs and recrossed them indolently. In the late twenties, tall, of a splendid length of

limb, blond, with a freshness of colour and a level blue gaze, his eyes had moments of uncommon charm and of complete absorption. His trait of somewhat persistent aloofness did not make for favour, many disputing his understanding of the men and women in his books whom he shunned in real life. There was a nice precision about his speech that never suffered relapse, and for the most part a certain "niceness" about his thoughts. It may have been because of this that his friends questioned his possessing what they termed the "human touch" when what they meant was the use of a grosser word.

Sefton remained with his eyes fixed upon the darkening walls, whilst without the vague September dusk, like an impalpable mist, clustered outside the club windows. When a moment later an attendant entered and switched on the lights in the reading-lamp at his elbow, he scarcely noticed the change.

His mind once more at work in the old involute wanderings asking himself again:

"How could she vanish utterly? . . . To think they never found her bag, or any article of clothing, or jewelry, not even her drawing-box. Even thought it had been suicide—how could she disappear as though she had never been . . . and for three years . . ."

He checked himself. Each conjecture was a blind alley, a part of the great general pattern of the labyrinth in which he had lost himself for months. There was only one way of freeing himself from an obsession which had become as insidious as the grip of a malignant disease.

He caught up his hat, ran downstairs and out, signalled a taxicab from the club stand, and a moment later was being driven up Fifth Avenue. He dismissed the cab at the corner of Eightieth Street and walked briskly to Madison Avenue. Here he crossed the avenue and allowed his footsteps to become more deliberate as he drew near the house.

It was some time since he had seen it, but he had never forgotten its general appearance. No. 33 was situated on

the north side of the street, midway between Madison and Park, an undetached brick structure, in no way an unusual town house. It did not look new, yet it could not be thirty years old, since it had escaped the brownstone period. It was modest, unobtrusive, with green shutters and a diminutive balcony upheld by Georgian columns of white limestone at the front door. It was set back a few yards from the pavement, protected by a fence of iron palings, behind which grew a hedge of well-trimmed privet. A semi-circle of white marguerites, red geraniums and lobelia ornamented the balcony. The house was three-storied, the windows hung with half-curtains in both the upper and lower sashes. In the basement was a grilled window, and sunken stairs led to a door connected with the servants' gate.

Sefton would have liked to linger before the house, since there were lights within, but, aware of already having attracted the attention of the night-watchman on the corner, he moved on. The man was evidently in the employ of the Cass household, as they doubtless had occasion to have the house protected from unbridled curiosity following the newspaper investigations. Now that Sefton had refreshed his memory of the house, Miss Cass's disappearance seemed to him more incomprehensible than ever. He found himself wondering if perhaps she had not been lost at all, but was concealed within for reasons of which the public was uninformed.

He retraced his steps slowly toward Madison Avenue while every detail of No. 33 pressed itself indelibly upon his mind. It was just the sort of a house in which one would not expect anything to occur. And that elusive quality in itself of the expensive, the comfortable and yet commonplace was the ideal setting for the drama.

The street was deserted, and realising that his progress, halting and apparently without objective, remained under the eye of the night watchman, he stepped inside the portico of an apartment building directly opposite. Here in the doorway he was outside the man's line of vision, and it

gave him an opportunity to take one last look at the house of mystery before returning to the club.

As he stood there self-absorbed in his interest watching the lighted windows, shaded and shadowless, he was suddenly aware of someone standing at his elbow.

"Pardon me, sir, you wished to see the apartment?"

Jay Sefton looked at the little man at his side, precise, courteous, evidently a renting agent.

The night watchman was pacing slowly by and had come to a full stop in the doorway.

"Yes," Sefton agreed, aware that being under observation had contributed to his consecutiveness. "How many rooms has it?"

"Four. It's fully furnished and a great bargain. This way, please."

He was led to a lift encrusted with wedgewood medallions and mirror-lined which carried him to the fifth floor. Here the agent crossed the hall, inserted a key and unlocked a door. Putting an arm inside the casement, he felt for the switch and turned up the lights.

"Go right in. There's no one here. This is a bachelor apartment. The party who owns it has been called out of town on business and asked us to do what we could to sublet it furnished. It was used by a bachelor, but it's large enough for a married couple."

Sefton entered a square hall, lighted dimly from above by an old Italian lantern. The walls were hung with three Flemish tapestries, and the only furniture was an old wall fountain, a console and two chairs.

"This is the sitting-room."

He followed the agent into a large space, enclosed by grey, unlitteed walls, the room grouped with furniture of heavy old English tables and easy chairs. There was a rotary bookcase and a broad writing table placed before a bow-window.

Sefton strode across the room and held aside the curtains to look out. The windows commanded a comprehensive view of Mr. Cass's house. No one could enter or

leave undetected by anyone watching from those windows. He turned back to survey the room once more: there was a deep hearth with logs, and even the books on the shelves showed a taste which was not an affliction. It was the sitting-room which attracted him although he gave a glance at the dining-room and bedroom.

"If the apartment answers your requirements, and you're a single man, I could get you the Japanese servant the last party had. He was here to see me yesterday about a job. He's a very good gentleman's valet and general servant, sir. He doesn't sleep in the apartment but there's a room for him at the top of the house. It's a bargain, sir, if you can use it."

Sefton asked him the price. He realised after it was quoted to him that it was surprisingly cheap. He had returned to the sitting-room and stood looking out the window at the lights of Mr. Cass's house across the street.

Then he said succinctly:

"I'll take it."

III

JAY SEFTON supplied his name and address, his banker's and those of his publishers and tailor as guarantors of his solvency. Three days later, the references having been investigated and found adequate, a lease was sent him which he signed, and at the end of a week the transfer had been made and he removed from the Club to East 80th Street.

S. Fuis, the diminutive Japanese, returned to past surroundings under new directorship, proved one of those rare domestics, a capable gentleman's man who kept Mr. Sefton's clothes pressed, his boots treed, and his bath ready. If the small brown man was less successful as cook he at least accomplished the seemingly incredible in combining the offices of three servants in one.

He found upon closer inspection that the apartment, instead of not living up to first impressions, very much surpassed them. The rooms were furnished with a completeness which left nothing to be supplemented, and a second view of the bookshelves quickened the novelist's interest in the previous tenant. But living face to face with 33 East Eightieth Street made continued thought of anyone other than his neighbours negligible.

Late one afternoon, reproaching himself with wasting time and doubtful of the outcome of his experiment, he bethought himself of a spinster cousin of his whom he suspected had returned to town and whom he was conscious of having neglected. She was a middle-aged woman, who was given to spending her winters in New York, where she lived in Park Avenue in a diminutive apartment, dependent on the services of a single maid. The woman enjoyed a slight income which allowed her to live in a small way, with a few retracted months in town followed by summers of visiting a succession of New England relatives. He en-

tered the vestibule conscious that he would at least be in time for a cup of tea. As she opened the door to receive him and he crossed the narrow hall to her sitting-room, he felt a moment's annoyance to see he was not the only visitor.

"Come in, Jay. I want you to meet Mrs. Slaterlee. This is my cousin Jay Sefton."

A lady seated in the shadow of an immense samovar on the tea table raised an ungloved hand:

"I've read 'Unexposed,'" she said in a voice that carried both strength and sincerity, "and I want to tell you what I think of it."

"Mrs. Slaterlee," interrupted his cousin, "holds the chair of English Literature at Vassar, so that her liking your book really means something."

A few moments later the subject of his book was seemingly exhausted, but Mrs. Slaterlee continued with its discussion with some persistence.

"You have a Gallic touch which I admire. The idea that life should be written about as it is never lived is so tiresome. Why should all fiction become desexualized?"

"You mustn't look to me for the answer."

"After all, the strongest emotion of which we are capable is self-preservation, the second is propagation, and the third is the parental love of offspring. Why should literature ignore that set of feelings which account for our being here? I'm not old-fashioned. I believe in rather plain language. I tell my students not to approach their work with a blush and a giggle. And not to make their observations through a veil. I have one rather talented student. She's an immense admirer of yours. Her people live next door to your club and she tells me she's often seen you in the window writing."

Sefton laughed.

"Not now," he said. "I've moved. I'm living in East 80th Street."

"The apartment building on the South Side?"

"Yes."

"I remember when the building was being constructed. But I haven't been in that street in three years. I used to have friends who lived opposite you."

"The Casses?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever know Miss Helena?"

"She was one of my girls at Vassar. I knew her particularly well,—or at least I thought I did. In fact, I chaperoned her with two others on that last trip abroad. That was a lamentable affair, wasn't it?"

"Very."

"But it seems futile to talk about it now."

Then glancing at her watch at her wrist, she saw the time and rose. After her leave-taking with her friend she turned to Sefton.

"I shall tell my students I have shaken hands with the great man. I am looking forward to your next book already. Don't do the way all other novelists do—become careless and acquisitive, and turn out a flood of disappointing work. You've set a standard and we won't be satisfied with anything below it."

As Sefton signified his intention of leaving with her, his cousin protested:

"Jay, you're not going too? Why, I've hardly seen you."

As he reached the pavement with Mrs. Slaterlee at his side, he enquired if he should have a taxicab called since he saw there was no car waiting for her.

"No. Let us walk. I love the late November days in New York. Are you going downtown?"

He assented automatically and they started South.

"After the routine of Vassar," she remarked, "an occasional week-end in town is in the nature of a dissipation to me. I come up quite often while the opera is here for a Saturday night performance. I'm particularly fond of French opera."

"So am I. But one can't hope to hear it at the Metropolitan where Italian influences are so strong. But the next time there is something I wish you'd let me take you."

He had been looking at Mrs. Slaterlee by each successive street lamp they passed and decided that she was frankly middle-aged so that she would not resent his invitation.

"And if you ever overcome your aversion to East 80th Street sufficiently to call on the Casses I wish you'd allow me to accompany you."

He was surprised at his own audacity in this last request but his companion seemed not to notice it, and took up his remark quite literally.

"Are the Casses friends of yours?"

"No. But we have mutual friends."

"Just what can one do in a position like ours? I hope her family don't feel I've neglected them because they're in trouble. But what can one say? One can't sympathise. One doesn't wish to pry. There doesn't seem to be any code of behaviour which covers the case of a mysterious disappearance. And so this awful pall of silence endures. I couldn't go to see them and ignore all mention of Helena. She was the only member of the family I knew at all well, or was in any way attached to. If there is anything I could do I would like to do it. But I can't go to see a mother and daughter who refuse all mention of Helena, who dress in half mourning and tacitly agree the girl is dead. If I *knew* Helena were dead it would be a different matter. But I don't, and I don't even know that they do or whether they merely hope she is. So I have remained away through sheer embarrassment in an awkward situation and I believe most of their friends have done the same."

"I wish you'd tell me something about Miss Cass."

"What?"

"Her disposition, the type of girl she represented. One hears such conflicting accounts. And now that she's dead, *if she is dead*, there seems no contradicting them."

"You've asked a very poor person for an account of her. You see, I knew all of Helena's faults and shortcomings. I was alive to every one of them. And those were points on which the press were sedulously silent. They wanted

the right kind of 'story' at all costs. I was very fond of Helena. She was a splendid sort of girl in a curious way. Without being masculine she was like a very fine boy. Generous, large-hearted, devoid of all small feeling, full of life and energy and a tremendous curiosity to know the world. She was magnetic, not beautiful, and as a man she would have been loved by everyone. She was a human dynamo. If she could only have played football and been stroke oar on the Yale crew she would have used up all her superfluous energy which, unfortunately, went into other channels."

"You arouse my curiosity."

"Helena was intensely 'modern,' but I don't use the word in its unpleasant sense. She was not modern in a neurotic way, like the quantities of girls who wish to release their souls and do so by removing all clothing but two yards of chiffon and then persist in dancing in public out of doors. One may call that 'modern,' but there is a word that describes it more accurately. Such abysses would never have suggested themselves to Helena. Her desire was to live, to experience, to see life. If she had only cared for work she could have matriculated for the literary tripos and the highest honours. She possessed brain enough and concentration, but she didn't want to work. She could do rather better than the average without study. She really enjoyed languages. She spoke an excellent French for an American, German and some Spanish. She had a pleasant voice, was a born mimic. She took part in our plays and was quite an exceptional amateur actress. But she wouldn't have worked hard enough to go on the stage. She was never aware of rivalry and all the girls liked her."

"This sounds only like praise."

"Her weak points——" and Mrs. Slaterlee smiled ruefully. "Helena was utterly unmanageable. She was worse than the traditional handful. All her life she had never been curbed. She was like a race horse that had never been taken out of the stable."

"She could make time?"

"She ran away with one. She never saw barriers. She simply leapt them. And by this I don't mean she was fast. In spite of her seeming sophistication she was a child at heart. She was unafraid and didn't realise risks. I never knew her until she came to Vassar. Before that she had been at boarding school and was expected to make her début in society. It was because of her father that this plan miscarried."

"Were she and her father friends?"

"I see you've heard. That's why you ask me?"

"No. On my honour. It's only from observation. I've seen Mr. Cass and I wondered."

"He and Helena were all but arch enemies. She realised he was a ridiculous, tyrannical man with a point of view of 1860. Mentally she was more than a match for him. She did not respect his financial meanness and his mental posturings. He saw himself as a sort of hero of romance, a Count d'Orsay, a Barbey D'Aurenvilly. To her he was an absurd old poseur, who wore the clothes of a young blade. They were hostile and antagonistic to each other, she because he attempted a crushing authority, and he because he was not equal to her ridicule. So she was sent to Vassar to have her away from home. Her vacations were mostly spent with her friends. I believe she attempted to control herself when under the parental roof but without much success. But during those periods her mother was miserable and her younger sister in tears. I blame Helena for being utterly unfilial, and yet I agree with her. Mr. Cass is a caricature."

She continued to walk in silence, and then she added:

"I have just been thinking what a character she would have been. A sort of splendid young rebel, but people would probably prefer to read of more dutiful children. I can't begin to tell you the tricks she played at Vassar. She broke every rule of the college, I think, simply because rules annoyed her. Probably if she had been allowed perfect freedom she wouldn't have cared for it."

Since urging her on to this subject Mr. Sefton had made

scarcely a remark, fearing to distract her attention. He realised he was listening to a woman whose opinions he could accept as true. Now as they reached her hotel, a modest building in West 47th Street, they hesitated for a moment on the pavement, until noticing an attendant had opened the door for them, she said:

"Won't you come in for a few minutes?"

"Just for a minute," he agreed.

They crossed the lounge, she leading to a small writing room which was deserted.

"From the first Helena always reminded me of a sort of modern Diana. She looked like one. Her photographs were really quite unlike. She had sparkling eyes, bright, eloquent, a trifle too large for her face, surrounded by a good deal of white, and the thickest black hair. She stood well, walked well. And one felt she was beautiful because she was so sound and such a perfect young animal. Yet she was not the sort of woman to marry and proliferate and become the conventional mother with subordinate interests. I remember thinking this when she was a student and wondering what would become of her. And I thought then that though matrimony would not satisfy her, neither would spinsterhood, and that she could only remain the eternal Diana by dying young."

"Did no man ever enter her life?"

"Now you are thinking of Mr. Buel."

"Of course I know what the press printed. They strongly suggested that it was a case of 'find the man.'"

"Yes, but the man was found. Detectives haven't taken an eye off of him since. His mail has been opened, his wire tapped, and he himself followed, but there's never been a trace of his hearing from her or being in communication with her directly."

"Where is Buel now?"

"He still lives in Detroit, I believe. Your interest in this is not one of gossip, is it, Mr. Sefton?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I will tell you, confidentially, a few facts. It's

such a long time since I've spoken of Helena. You don't know what a relief it is to my conscience that I was no longer responsible for her when she was lost. If I had been I don't know what I would have done."

The fact that he was obtaining evidence he had first thought to put to public use for the moment caused him no disquietude. He felt an insatiable hunger to know just what had transpired, in which the author was apostate beside the detective within him. After all there could be nothing more engrossing than the business of following up a clue which had long been discarded and find the solution himself.

"When Helena was in her senior year, an uncle of one of the girls came down to college to see her. He was not a particularly attractive man, forty or thereabouts, large, a rather heavy, settled type. A man who'd had his youth though he might not have spent it prodigally, he seemed to have forfeited it in some way. The man was somewhat ponderous, not cerebral like Helena, apparently moderate, easy going. A sound sleeper who lived within the radius of a good digestion and a frequent after-dinner nap. He was the last man in the world to attract a high spirited girl like Helena."

"This was Jordan Buel?"

"Yes. You're surprised?"

"Naturally."

"Well, you would have been more so if you had seen him. He seemed pre-eminently safe; as much so as though he had been the father of the girl. He was a sort of father to Birdie Hyde. She was an orphan, an unimaginative little thing, the usual type cut out according to pattern. Mr. Jordan Buel and a married brother were her uncles and paid for her education. As a matter of duty he came to college once or twice a year. Birdie hardly knew him, wasn't at her ease and didn't know what to talk about. She introduced Mr. Buel to Helena as the brightest girl she knew. He seems to have been the first man Helena had ever met. The others were boys, or else men so old that they might

have been of her own sex so far as any attraction of the male for the female is concerned."

"Did you suspect she was interested?"

"Not really. I believe he sent her up a box of sweets from Sherry's after his return. And later he found reason for coming back and always he devoted himself to her. He was there at graduation and by that time it seems they considered themselves engaged."

"Engaged?"

"This is a new version to you?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I've always blamed Jordan Buel. He was old enough even if he were not a man of the world; he could not have been so ignorant that he did not know that he should have come first to Mr. Cass and told him of his intentions and asked permission. But it is impossible to expect anything more than the code of savages of some of our countrymen. And perhaps Helena would not have allowed it. Anyway, after her graduation Helena was once more at home. Mr. Buel followed her to New York, called on her and was presented to her family. Mr. Cass wished to know who the man was and why he was coming to the house. It never seems to have occurred to him that one of his daughters should marry. When Helena told him they were engaged that naturally precipitated a crisis. The man was debarred the house and Helena was instructed to give him his congé. At first she refused to do this and there were scenes, recriminations, denunciations and tears. But the tears, you may be sure, were never Helena's. She was not hysterical. Her engagement ring, a mammoth emerald-cut diamond, disappeared. She was supposed to have given it back to Mr. Buel but she didn't. I believe she always wore it when she had her gloves on as a matter of sentiment. She wished to feel that a part of her was encircled by something which was his. . . ."

She paused in her narrative, looked about the room and then her glance returned to Sefton's eyes, which were watching every movement of her lips with interest.

"At this time I was taking Vida Newbolt and Carimai Evans abroad, when Helena and Mrs. Cass beseeched me to allow Helena to come with us. I explained that our reservations had been made; we had our tickets and our entire itinerary was planned, and that another person would upset our calculations. Still they insisted. Since Helena's falling out with her father life at home was out of the question, as he had become futilely abusive and unending in his demands, and she had become scornful and ironic. It was, in fact, after a great deal of pleading on Mrs. Cass's side, that she had gained her husband's consent to let Helena leave, and then under the arrangement that Mrs. Cass pay for Helena's trip out of her own money. I weakened and agreed, although I knew from past experience that I wouldn't have much peace and I would never know where the girl was. She managed to get a stateroom from someone who had cancelled passage at the last moment and was ready on twenty-four hours' notice. . . ."

Again she stopped, and this time Sefton noticed that her eyes sought her watch and he was aware of having remained longer than had been expected. He wondered if he was detaining Mrs. Slaterlee from dressing for dinner or if she had some engagement for the evening. But he made no movement of leave-taking and she continued her story.

It was a quarter of an hour later that he rose. Mrs. Slaterlee had now told him what she had never uttered before, either to Mrs. Cass or Helena's friends, to the press or the detective who had interrogated her upon her return from Europe. Sefton realised that he possessed facts that had never been made public and which no one who had searched systematically for the girl had ever been acquainted with. When he left the hotel it was with a feeling of triumph. With the information about Miss Cass given him that evening, he knew it was well within his power to find her.

BOOK II

IV

Miss Cass was the last person to come aboard after sailing time. The gangplank was held while she kissed her mother and sister, and then ran up a second before the ropes were cast off.

Mrs. Slaterlee felt a moment's contrition when she recalled the objections she had raised to Helena's joining them, as Miss Cass made her way to the little party standing beside the crowded rail. She was conscious that although the girl was not really pretty she was already a centre of interest.

She greeted Mrs. Slaterlee and her two charges with unfeigned delight, which made Mrs. Slaterlee feel that after all she had been very unfair to this young lady. They remained for several minutes at the rail, waving perfunctory farewells, although they were no longer able to distinguish anyone left on the dock.

"I thought we had lost you," Mrs. Slaterlee remarked.

"I'm always late," Helena confessed, voicing a chronic weakness, "but I've never missed a train or a boat in my life."

There was something engaging in the candour with which she named her frailties.

"Let me carry your bag, if you'll trust me with it."

A moment later they had gone below to the writing-room where Mrs. Slaterlee and her two girls hastily secured the three last writing tables to indite farewell notes.

"It will only take me a few moments," Mrs. Slaterlee explained, "and then you may have my table."

"Don't hurry. I have no one to write to. I said good-bye to mother and Annis only a few minutes ago, and I won't repeat it."

She had settled herself in an easy chair where a revolving electric fan played upon her, which caught loosened tendrils of her hair and kept them astir about her face like a darkened nimbus. Mrs. Slaterlee, watching her from time to time above a recalcitrant pen, felt she had never seen the girl looking more provocative and utterly charming. She felt Miss Cass was in far too reasonable a humour to be quite safe, and yet the expression of her face was one of mobile contentment.

Later that evening she tapped on Mrs. Slaterlee's door and entered her stateroom, to ask if she could administer to her comfort, since the four ladies were travelling without the assistance of a maid. Miss Cass was already dressed for dinner, and, like many women who are not beautiful, her bared throat and arms brought unsuspected perfections into view, and by some curious chemistry turned her shortcomings into added charms. Mrs. Slaterlee had never possessed a personal maid, and was rather in doubt as to her duties. However, it was safer to keep Helena under her eye, so she handed her the bodice of her dinner dress with instructions to take a stitch in a frill of lace in the neck and sleeves.

Following dinner there was still little motion on board as the ship plowed through the illimitable expanse, not unlike dark meadows, which broke into constant blossom suggesting hedgerows of white thorn and fields of scattered daisies. A cooler wind now met them, and the four travellers spent an hour solemnly stretched out in a row under wraps on the deck chairs. By quarter to ten they were all glad to end an interminable evening by retiring.

Miss Cass had her breakfast served in her stateroom next morning and did not rise until late. When Mrs. Slaterlee went in search of her at mid-day, she found that Helena had quit her room nor did an exhaustive investigation reveal any trace of her. She was not on deck, in the

salons, writing-rooms nor in the Ritz restaurant. It was some time before she was found sitting on the stairs to the bridge talking earnestly to a large, broad-shouldered man in white flannels.

Mrs. Slaterlee, coming upon them suddenly, felt there was something familiar in the expanse of shoulder and thick, dark hair of the man watching Helena, his face completely in shadow from his cap drawn down over his eyes. It was not until Mrs. Slaterlee called Helena that he rose, and as he faced her she saw that the girl's companion was Mr. Jordan Buel.

He pulled off his cap, and in spite of the fact that the man was plainly forty, or thereabouts, he betrayed a certain boyishness, as though he had been discovered breaking some rule for which he was about to be reproved.

Helena attempted no explanations; she merely laughed. It was a tantalising trick of hers.

"Mrs. Slaterlee, you remember Mr. Buel," she said, as though there was nothing unusual in the meeting.

"I remember him perfectly."

"I thought you would."

"I've just been looking for you. Will you come to my stateroom for a minute?"

"Do you think you have acted quite honourably?" she asked when they were out of earshot.

"Honourably?"

She repeated the word as though nonplussed.

"You are not going to tell me you didn't know Mr. Buel was sailing by the same ship."

"I didn't."

Helena spoke earnestly. Then her face broke once more into smiles.

"You promise me you didn't know?"

There was satisfaction in the realisation that under no conditions would Helena resort to subterfuge or a lie. Beside Miss Evans and Miss Newbolt her faults were legion, but whereas Mrs. Slaterlee knew they were not above mis-

representation, at least Helena was brutally truthful at all times.

"No. I didn't know really. I told him I was going with you, and I knew he would try to book passage if it were possible. But he didn't let me know and I wasn't positive until this morning."

"Do you think you're pleasing your family in this?"

"If you mean father, then I must tell you I haven't the power of pleasing him. I can never remember having done so."

"I am supposedly taking you abroad to get you beyond the influence of this man."

"I can't get beyond his influence. I love him."

"You do?"

"Of course. I wouldn't look at him if I didn't."

"But it isn't as though you were engaged."

"We are!"

She lifted her left hand, and Mrs. Slaterlee saw that the great navette-shaped diamond was on her third finger; it was the only jewel she wore.

"You don't seem to realise my position. I am responsible for you until your safe return. If I had known Mr. Buel was on board I would have refused to let you accompany us. I think you knew I didn't want you, anyway."

"Don't be horrid."

"Why wasn't Mr. Buel's name on the sailing list? He's not travelling under another name, is he?"

"Of course not. He took passage too late to be down."

"Where was he last night at dinner?"

"He dined early in the regular dining-room, not in the Ritz. He thought he'd lie low until to-day. He stands terribly in awe of you. He's afraid you'll have him thrown overboard."

"Are you never going to grow up, Helena?" Mrs. Slaterlee asked, a touch of acerbity in her voice. "You're twenty already. Either you promise me not to see Mr. Buel again alone, or I send a wireless back by Cape Race to your father that he is on board. I give you your choice!"

"You wouldn't do that!"

"I shall, unless you promise. Then the responsibility will no longer be mine."

"I promise, of course."

But Mrs. Slaterlee did not find this arrangement as all encompassing as she had supposed. For while Miss Cass and Jordan Buel were no longer alone together, she found them able to converse with each other without the use of a spoken word. Their eyes and hands seemed to express their feelings, oblivious to her presence. And as they paced the deck three abreast she forgot that her charge was a naughty girl, and Mr. Buel had played his game unfairly; she was conscious only that they were lovers, and of feeling odious and *de trop*. She was unable to interpret the glances which they sent quivering across her person, and regretted that she had allowed Mrs. Cass's pleadings to soften her own resolve.

Nor could she give all her attention to Helena, for though she never caught Caramai or Vida pursuing any obvious flirtation, she was still aware that they had made the acquaintance of several gentlemen on board in devious ways. It was therefore a relief when Cherbourg was reached without mishap, and four hours later the boat-train to Paris drew into the Gare St. Lazare. Mr. Buel had been instructed that the ladies were stopping at the Hotel Meurice and that he was expected to seek quarters in another hostelry not of their neighbourhood. After being interminably detained by the Customs, they drove off in a small omnibus, their trunks on the roof, to their hotel in the Rue de Rivoli.

Here they were comfortably installed in a suite of three rooms high up at the rear of the building, their windows giving on to a panorama of roofs and chimney-pots of Paris. It was the first excursion abroad of both Vida and Caramai, and for their joint benefit days were planned at which mornings spent at the Louvre were followed by hurried returns for luncheon, to be superseded by refreshed attacks upon the art of Paris. Two evenings a week were

solemnly consecrated to a baignoire at the Français or Odeon in order to familiarise themselves with the language. Mrs. Slaterlee usually held a copy of the play and glanced through the succeeding scenes during entre-acts.

Helena's mind, at such times, was with Mr. Buel, who was probably listening to the new opera at the Comique or witnessing a very daring piece at the Variétés, to which all Paris was crowding. However, she had asked to become one of the party and so continued the ceaseless round, obedient, without protest. This continued for over a fortnight, when one afternoon Mrs. Slaterlee remarked that their itinerary included a visit to des Invalides, the Musée de Cluny and Hôtel de Ville. This time Miss Cass openly rebelled. Her familiarity with Paris made it impossible to enjoy the city as a tripper, and she begged permission not to accompany them, but be allowed to pay her respects to a friend who had an *hôtel* in Avenue Kléber.

Miss Cass had suddenly bethought herself of the Marquise de Lanel and decided to see her. Madame de Lanel was an acquaintance Miss Cass had made a couple of years previous on a Mediterranean liner, who, at that time, had been a Miss Edith Doelger, a native of Toledo, Ohio. Miss Doelger was pliant, garrulous, with a certain fluidity of thought which ran naturally to words, who had affixed herself to Miss Cass while en route between Algiers and Naples. Upon reaching the latter place Helena had taken the express to Rome and Miss Doelger had re-embarked for Greece. During the following months she had bombarded the object of her attachment with postcards, small souvenirs and a quantity of notes on tinted paper covered with large angular and ill-formed writing in which she signed herself "Yours fondly, Edith."

There were times when two of these letters reached her by a single post, to be followed by weeks of silence, after which a fresh fusilade of endearments was recommenced. Having remained for several months the recipient of successive affection and neglect, Helena one morning received the announcement of Miss Doelger's betrothal to the

Marquis de Lanel. She wrote that "Tristram" was already jealous of "dear Nell," since he had heard so much about her from his fiancée. Neither of them would be thoroughly happy, following their marriage, unless Nell paid them a "long, long visit." Helena smiled secretly over these effusions. She knew she would hear little of such invitations once Miss Doelger became the Marquise de Lanel.

In this, however, she did her friend an injustice and during the past year she received frequent communications sprawling over scented coroneted paper, in which she was requested to regard 20 bis Avenue Kléber as a "second home," and to look upon their estate in Brittany as her own. "Our latch-string is always out to you," she reiterated, and was as ever "fondly Edith."

An acquaintance that had been maintained almost entirely on paper, in which her correspondent's words had all seemed excessive, made her approach the hotel with some trepidation. She paid the coachman and alighted from her taxicab and rang the bell at No. 20 bis with a moment's doubt if she would recognise Edith if she passed her in the street. She had never returned the ardour of the other's affection and had been somewhat embarrassed by its violence.

She was admitted to a spacious, shrouded hall and directed up a flight of shallow steps into a salon which seemed a conventional setting for a Louis Quinze comedy. Here she remained in silence, punctuated only by the ticking of a large, round-bellied ormolu clock on the chimney piece. Twice she rose deciding to leave but there was no footman in the hall and she hesitated to ring in order to be shown out. Possibly Edith was bathing or dressing, although it was the hour when one should be functionally visible to guests. At the end of twenty minutes she was on her feet and resolute, her hand on the bell when she heard draperies on the stairs.

Then Madame de Lanel, in a teagown of silver lace, with bands of skunk, stood in the doorway, jewels flashing on her fingers and tassels of animated gems quivering in her

ears. She clasped one of Helena's hands in both of hers and kissed her impersonally. Miss Cass's first impression was that she had rarely obtained a kiss which expressed such utter boredom. A hurried survey of the Marquise's toilette assured her it had been assumed for her benefit.

"What are you doing in Paris?" she asked in a voice in which Toledo, Ohio, seemed infinitely remote, "and at this time of year?"

"Oh, Paris is very much the same at one season as at another, to anyone who is on the outside."

"But it shouldn't be. You Americans are so incomprehensible. If you've come for society you are much too late. This is my home, and yet I don't know a soul in town. Not a soul. And if you've come for clothes you are much too early."

She laughed indulgently and then remarked:

"The only costumes in evidence in August are for the ladies of the *autre monde* and for Americans."

Then she added more cordially:

"Tristram will be *désolé* to miss you. I've so often told him what dear friends we are. You see we go to our estate in Brittany early to-morrow and remain there until the holidays, so I suppose I shan't have another opportunity of seeing you."

Miss Cass expressed her regret and the Marquise, having made her absence plain, now interrogated her as to her purpose in coming to Paris. When Helena had explained, she said:

"Then you're a member of a party?"

"Yes."

"And you can't leave them?"

"Hardly."

"*Comme c'est ennuyant*. Of course there's nothing to do in the country, and Tristram and I are very dull, but I should have loved to have you with us. You and I could amuse ourselves just being together, couldn't we?"

Helena agreed.

"But you wouldn't ask to be released?"

"I couldn't. I begged to be included. And my being along rather lessens Mrs. Slaterlee's expense, so I wouldn't suggest it."

"I don't know whether to be annoyed with you or not. I have promised myself a visit from you for so long. Why didn't you make plans to be left here in my charge? I don't believe you trust Tristram and me."

Helena was silent.

"I see you haven't any very cogent reasons."

She hesitated and then said truthfully:

"I didn't know that you really meant it."

"Cela c'est trop fort!"

An hour later, following tea, Miss Cass suffered herself to be kissed by her hostess and, entering a taxicab, was driven back to the Meurice.

As she crossed the lounge a gentleman rose from an arm-chair and came toward her. She recognised Mr. Buel.

"Here you are!" he exclaimed. "I've been waiting nearly an hour. They told me you went out alone and I thought I'd take a chance that you'd return alone."

"But you shouldn't be here. We promised."

"Don't scold. I have a plan. The nights are so wonderful, why can't I take you out to Pré Catalan to-night? I mean all of you. Mrs. Slaterlee can sit between us. What a night to motor under the stars! You aren't seeing anything of Paris as it is, going to galleries by day and to stuffy performances of musty old plays by night. And you can't go about without a man, so why not utilise me? What do you say?"

"I'd love it. I'll ask Mrs. Slaterlee, only please go, and don't do this again. It doesn't look nice and Madame Slaterlee's opinion of me is none too high at present."

But Miss Cass had no more than uttered the words when Mrs. Slaterlee entered the lounge entrenched between her two charges. Mr. Buel approached her and bowed, intending an explanation of his presence, but Mrs. Slaterlee passed him, ignoring his salutation, and entered the lift with her young ladies. Helena was just in time to

follow her into the car before the door was closed upon her, and they rose. Buel cursed, put on his hat, and strode out to the street.

Helena was in her most pacifying mood when she entered Mrs. Slaterlee's bedroom, for she realised the evidence was against her. But her cheeks flamed slowly as the door was shut and the two women confronted each other. She felt then she would not be given a chance to explain.

"When you asked to remain behind so you could visit a friend I believed you. I don't know why I should after your reasons for joining us at all. I'm not going to say I am disappointed in you, for my feeling is so much stronger than that. At least you have a brain and I supposed a sense of honour. But the realisation that you are in trust I thought would keep you from acting differently. I don't suppose I would ever have known that you spent the afternoon with that man if we had not returned earlier than we expected. If I knew of anyone who was going back to New York, I should insist upon your being with them and writing a complete explanation to your father. But as I don't, I suppose the pleasure of my holiday must be destroyed by having to keep you always within sight. I shan't refer to this again, but in the future when you don't care to accompany us I shall remain with you. And I shall keep sedulously to this plan until you are home and I am no longer responsible for you."

There was a moment's pause after she finished speaking. The elder woman was about to open the door and dismiss Helena from her room, when she found her voice.

"Mrs. Slaterlee, I am no longer under your guidance. That was why I was talking to Mr. Buel this afternoon. The Marquise de Lanel has asked me to visit her and her husband in Brittany. They are leaving early to-morrow morning and I have promised to accompany them. I merely returned early in order to pack."

Twenty minutes later Miss Cass stood in the Louis-Quinze salon at 20 bis Avenue Kléber. As she explained

her predicament for a second time, the Marquise de Lanel showed the whites of her eyes.

"But, my dear, *why* have you quarrelled? How could you do anything so stupid? You must make your peace with *cette dame*."

"That, never. I can't. I told her I was leaving, that I was coming to you. How can I tell her now that that was sheer invention?"

"*Quelle bêtise*. Why on earth did you say such a thing?"

"I don't know. I was angry."

"Well, tell her that."

"I can't."

"And why not, *mon Dieu!*"

"Edith, don't you want me? You asked me this afternoon—you didn't know whether you could forgive me for not visiting you. And now I tell you I am free."

"Of course I want you, *chérie*. How can you suggest that? But this is hardly *convenable*."

"Why not?"

"I don't want you to come as the result of a quarrel. And then you will be so bored at the château."

"I shall be content if you and I are together," Miss Cass remarked shrewdly.

But Madame de Lanel seemed not to recognise her own words.

"Tristram is far from well and will have to be kept quiet. And we will do practically no entertaining. And then we are rather short of servants, and I'm not taking the car."

"I shan't mind. I shall enjoy the rest."

"Very well. You must spend the night with your party. We are to leave on the eight o'clock from the Gare Montparnasse to-morrow morning. And don't miss the train. Tristram is fussy about trains, so we won't wait for you if you are not there."

It was far from the invitation Miss Cass had expected, but as there seemed nothing else for her to do she acquiesced:

"I'll be there."

M

OUTSIDE the windows the flying landscape unfolded. The river valley was peaceful, verdant, its flow suave, voiceless between its banks thick with reeds and water grasses that waded knee deep into the stream. Here and there were long stretches of poplars, formal, clipped, looking more like a Sisley or a Didier than they did like rural France itself. And glittering in the August sun followed white, powdery roads over which an occasional motor sped racing the train.

It passed hamlets, clustering towns and the unvarying agricultural country, the fields cultivated, every clod pregnant, yielding its penultimate of life. Fields of turnips, lettuces and blue cabbages overlay the slopes like some intricate pattern of a mammoth quilt. Labourers at work raised bent bodies to watch the train out of sight.

Within their carriage Miss Cass sat opposite her host and hostess. She found the Marquise de Lanel a slight man whose ill health was still apparent and she imagined his long residence in the country was to overcome continued ænemia and threatened tuberculosis. Slight of build, his face faintly bronzed by much out-of-door life, his high colour did not deceive her as to his frail constitution. She noticed his hands, delicately made, two fingers nicotine-stained from incessant smoking.

Directly they had ensconced themselves to prepare for several hours of travel Madame de Lanel became insistent upon finding Tristram's cap, unpacking his rug and performing various offices for his comfort. He submitted through habit to these attentions, but Miss Cass believed it was with the fervent wish that he might be cared for with less aggression. She realised that although Edith loved her husband and still remained in some awe of him, she

was not adverse to having her devotion commented upon.

As she faced the brilliant sunlight without, by some effect of light she seemed less vivid than in her shaded salon. A blonde of extreme type, she was fair almost to the point of being colourless. And Helena was interested to notice that when her friend's cheek rested against her dark travelling pillow that it left a trace of powder like the pollen of a moth. It was a moth that Edith resembled, with her pale lashes and faint brows.

"Do you know," she remarked, "my French 'in-laws' had never met an American until they met poor little me. They had seen our countrywomen at a distance—Paris is overrun with them at certain seasons—but they had never met one. *Ils ont les idées les plus extraordinaires de nos mœurs.* They call me 'Bébé.' They said 'Edith' *ne me va pas.*"

She spoke a correct, painstaking French, an accomplishment which she believed was not native to the average tripper.

"Cela vous ennue si je parle la langue de mon adoption. Je me fiche de l'Anglais, et j'ai un tas de chose à vous dire."

Helena smiled.

"Tout au contraire. Cela me plaît encore mieux. Pendant que je suis ici, je veux être aussi Parisienne que possible."

Madame de Lanel made no comment, but the Marquis laid aside his *Mercure de France* surprised by the quality of her pronunciation. He was not the first to be amazed by the cadence of her speech, liquid, clear, articulate.

"Ton amie parle bien. Hein?"

"Du vrai?" Helena persisted.

"Not badly, but she has the inevitable accent," Madame de Lanel was at some pains to say.

"Mille remerciements, Bébé."

"Don't call me *Bébé*," she continued with asperity. "That *petit* name is only for my French relatives. After all we are Americans and it is absurd for us to attempt to

hinder our speech by talking a language which is foreign to us both."

Nor did her hostess relapse into French again while in the presence of her guest.

It was past mid-day when they alighted from the train. A series of mishaps, microscopic in themselves, but persistent, had served to endanger Madame de Lanel's good nature, so that the drive to the château was achieved in almost total silence. True to her word the Marquise had not taken her car from Paris and they drove behind a pair of light luggage horses, a laborious progress under a blinding sun. Miss Cass, whose own fondness was for flying trains and swifter motor cars, curbed a natural impatience. Her friend had offered her unexpected asylum and she was in a mood to appreciate her slightest whim.

From time to time Monsieur de Lanel pointed out acres they passed which had belonged to his grandfather, and of the remaining property that was his own. She surmised that his was the simple, unaffected pride in his farm which the Marquise preferred to refer to as the "château," or the "estate." He had developed an interest in raising short-horns, and expressed a desire to visit the great cattle ranches of America, but the subject was not sympathetic to his wife. She was not actively annoyed, since his fancy was profitless, but she could not have endured the thought of his dealing in cattle becoming a source of income.

The house, as they approached it, was low lying, a rambling structure, unostentatious, surrounded by plane trees and vivid turf, and at a distance were stables and a quantity of out-houses all scrupulously white.

Bidden to enter, Miss Cass found herself in a long, low hall, with raftered ceilings, such as she had imagined were to be found in old French inns in Cathedral towns. A few steps admitted to a vast lounge and a music room beyond, furnished in old French pieces, and the evidence of Monsieur de Lanel's untiring travels covered walls and floor.

"What an adorable fireplace," she remarked as she stood well under its hood.

Edith interrupted her with a light touch on her arm.

"Marie will show you to your room now," she said, "and I will have your tea sent up so you can rest until dinner. I know you're tired."

Miss Cass followed the parlour maid upstairs, feeling very untired and rebellious. As she continued down the upper hall she passed several open doors. She caught a glimpse of large sitting-rooms and dressing-rooms that connected Madame de Lanel's suite with that of her husband's.

At the end of the passage the parlour maid opened a door to a tiny bedroom which contained one window and was furnished with a bed, a chest of drawers, a writing table and two chairs. Miss Cass looked about her with a feeling of rising indignation. It was not such a room as she could have accepted in any hotel. She wondered why such cramped and uncomfortable quarters had been reserved especially for her. Surely there must be other guest rooms. The maid had unpacked the contents of her bag and laid them away in drawers. After murmuring that tea would be sent up presently, she withdrew.

Miss Cass paced the length of the room twice and then sat down. In passing the mirror she had caught a glimpse of her expression and it had not been pleasant. After all she was spoiled and it was foolish to allow trifles to upset one's temper. "*Il faut du calme*," as her hostess would say, and at the thought of the Marquise de Lanel she began to laugh.

She removed her hat, her blouse and skirt and put on a muslin dressing sacque and lay down in her petticoat on the bed. She vaguely wondered if this wasn't really her maid's room, who perhaps had not been in the habit of sleeping in the servants' hall so as to be near her mistress. Her trunk had not arrived and she had brought nothing with her to read. She thought once to rise and dress and go below stairs in a search of something to amuse her, and then she felt curiously sure that any such action would annoy Ma-

dame de Lanel. She had been instructed to rest, and it was advisable that she obey.

Her glance taking in the limitations of her room noticed two candlesticks on the chest of drawers. The house was without electricity; that was her only means of lighting the room. She had planned to excuse herself shortly after dinner and read, but even such diversion was not possible.

When tea arrived she drank it almost at a draught and then lay down once more. She felt particularly annoyed when the dressing bell rang that she had to put on the same dress she had travelled in. She remembered a tea gown in her trunk in which she would have appeared to greater advantage.

The Marquise de Lanel told her early next morning that she was driving to the village and requested her friend to accompany her.

"A few of the country families are giving a dance next month and I am on one of the committees, so I thought I would find out just what has been planned during my absence. The Countess des Roches and a number of pleasant people are active workers. Then I must make sure of a few orders for Tristram's lunch. He's entertaining some old *Lycée* friends to-morrow. It's too bad that it has to be while you're here. If you were only a married woman I'd ask you to come downstairs, but since you're not I'll have a tray sent up to your room."

They had entered a governess'-cart, the Marquise had taken the reins and they were now jolting over the country road.

"I'm not taking any groom with me this morning," she said explaining, "because every man is needed during August and September. We're short of servants as it is, and, naturally, I don't stand on any *cérémonie* with you. You can hold the reins while I look after my commissions."

The morning was clear, unveiled, the arch of empyrean as dazzling in colour as a liquid turquoise. The smell of wild things in the air; the essence of the country made itself felt in a thousand scents, ripening berries, bleaching

grass and the aroma of fresh growth bruised by grazing cattle. Several times their approach startled a covey of partridges from the roadside or in the dust by their wheels they saw ground-coloured toads hopping among the weeds.

Reaching the village, her hostess handed the reins to Miss Cass and alighted to make the rounds of the market and the clustering shops which enclosed the public square. For some time Helena remained amused by the animated life as shrewd housewives bargained, their panniers overflowing with vegetables, and peasants clattered by on wooden sabots filled with straw. The Marquise had been absent an hour before Helena observed her returning to the cart accompanied by a Frenchman, while a peasant followed a few steps behind them carrying their purchases.

As they reached the governess'-cart the Marquise turned to dismiss her acquaintance, but the Frenchman having sighted Helena, made some remark about *la belle Américaine*, and Edith introduced Comte André.

He was *enchanté*, and asked if Mademoiselle was visiting la Marquise. Hearing that she was, he expressed an intention of coming to see them, but Edith had taken the reins and now seemed restive to be off.

"Will Mademoiselle be here for the charity ball next month?"

Helena was about to agree when Madame de Lanel spoke up promptly.

"I hope so," she said. "That is if Miss Cass can urge her mother to let her return to me. Au revoir."

The single sentence seemed to vibrate in the air during the drive back. The charity ball was scheduled to take place in three weeks. That meant she was intended to terminate her visit before then. . . .

What had she done or said to rouse this latent antagonism, for there was no doubting their strained relations which were momentarily growing nearer and nearer to open rupture. Under present conditions it was impossible for her to remain, nor could she travel about Europe alone. It meant writing to Mrs. Slaterlee and begging to return to the shel-

ter of her chaperonage while she ate very humble pie indeed. It would not be pleasant; it would mean defeat; yet anything was preferable to the scant courtesy which existed between her and her hostess. She made up her mind to compose a letter to Mrs. Slaterlee directly they reached the house, and since the point was decided she could endure Madame de Lanel's snubs with greater fortitude now she was so soon to renounce her hospitality.

That afternoon the letter written and despatched, Helena remained seated on the verandah amusing herself with a game of solitaire when there came a great clatter of hoofs up the drive and she saw that two horsemen were cantering toward the house. As they swung to the ground she recognised one to be Comte André of the morning encounter and the second his friend. Helena remained on the verandah chatting with them while she sent a maid to summon Madame de Lanel, but as that lady did not appear at the end of a half hour Helena rang once more. The parlour maid explained that Madame had been detained but would be down presently.

Comte André, who seemed content with present company, suggested a rubber at bridge, but when this had been played and Madame de Lanel had sent no further message to explain her absence, Miss Cass ran upstairs and knocked on her door. There was no answer and opening the door to Edith's sitting-room, she found it unoccupied. She was gripped by a feeling of rage. She had purposely been left alone to talk to two men whom she did not know while her hostess had gone to bed or perhaps left by the rear of the house for an afternoon's gunning with her husband.

Helena returned promptly to the verandah profuse in her apologies for Madame de Lanel, who she said was suffering from a severe headache; was in fact feeling very, very ill, so she must be excused. In reply to the gentlemen's commiseration she assured them that a doctor was not necessary. That the care of Miss Cass and Madame's maid was all that was required. After she had seen Comte

André and his friend mount their horses and ride disconsolately away she climbed the stairs to her room.

She realised at once that Madame de Lanel's action was not the result of a haphazard irritation or annoyance. This was the definite outgrowth of a purpose, which was to rid herself of her unwelcome guest in as brief a time as possible. Each effrontery to ordinary hospitality had been planned and was part of an expected crisis toward which they were moving. The woman had decided upon a quarrel and was now lying in wait for the means of precipitance.

That night at dinner Miss Cass made no reference to the gentlemen's visit or Edith's non-appearance. She was trying to determine what factor had brought about the breach. Surely, she reaffirmed, the Marquise did not do her the honour to be jealous, since Monsieur de Lanel's attentions had at no time been more than those of host and had increased only as his wife had become more negligent of her guest's comfort. Twice he voiced some monitory objection to the Marquise for making plans for the future in which Miss Cass had no part, to which she replied:

"But Helena does not want to be treated like a guest, do you, Helena?"

"Indeed not."

"But I can't make that clear to Tristram. He seems to think that while you're here I should be with you every minute. I tell him you enjoy yourself more being alone, and anyway I warned you we were fearfully dull, didn't I?"

"I believe you did."

"Men don't understand that women don't want to be perpetually together. The real trouble is men don't understand women at all."

This utterance passed in silence. Then Miss Cass fixed Edith with her eyes as she watched her across the table.

"Isn't it our salvation," she said smilingly, "that men don't understand us? Did you ever think what a horrible place the world would be if men saw through women's motives as we women see through each other's? There is

no greater protection for the average woman from being found out than to be misunderstood."

She realised that night in her room that her seemingly affable passage at arms at dinner had not been the wisest procedure. The Marquise was looking for an instrument that she could place her hands upon as a means of opening hostilities. Was it not therefore ill-advised for her to seem to heave the first brick? She must choose each word with care until she heard from Mrs. Slaterlee, and since that would take two days she would keep to the safety of her room and silence so as to wait until supplied with a place to lay her head before she was evicted from her present shelter.

The next day was the morning of the Marquis de Lanel's luncheon and his wife remained invisible until noon-day. Miss Cass's offer to supply the table with flowers was rejected, and she remained in her room as the motors began to arrive at one o'clock and the explosion of many men's voices came up to her door. By two o'clock the voices had become a confused drone, heard only indistinctly, and she judged the twenty men were seated at table. It was an hour later that there came a tap on her door and a maid entered bearing a tray on which was her luncheon. As she took one glance at the soup, cutlet and boiled potato she realised she had been sent a part of the servants' meal, not that which the guests were enjoying. She experienced a moment of unreasoning anger. She refused to touch the food. She would allow the tray to return uninvestigated. . . .

By four o'clock, overcome with hunger, she ate the cold food ravenously and wished that even the servants' meal had been less scanty. She had left no morsel of bread or cheese, or potato or cutlet, and drained the plate of soup.

The luncheon, it appeared, was a great success, and when Miss Cass descended the stairs that evening after the dressing-gong had sounded she found her host and hostess discussing certain guests in a room wreathed in smoke and filled with wilting decorations. Madame de Lanel was

still flushed and pleased as the result of being the only lady in the company of twenty gentlemen.

Next morning Helena found a letter on her breakfast tray, her own to Mrs. Slaterlee at the Hôtel Meurice returned with the statement that the addressee was no longer a guest and had left no forwarding address. Helena had not thought of that exigency in making her plans, and she did not know what bankers Mrs. Slaterlee used. There was no way she could communicate with her without cabling to the President of Vassar for her address. For a moment she was sobered. She wondered if Madame de Lanel had looked at the mail bag that morning and seen her letter, or had they been sorted by a servant? She finished her breakfast, bathed and rose, ready for a walk. She needed time to think but on her return at noonday she would have some plan of procedure.

Travelling alone in Europe, much as it would be prohibited by her family and expose her to conjecture of her friends, was at least a lesser evil than remaining where she was.

Miss Cass passed no one as she crossed the lower hall, opened the house door and stepped out on the dew-studded turf. The morning was still cool but in the unbroken blue above she recognised a threat of heat. She started down the drive, lifting her skirt above the tassels of sheep's parsley and milkweeds that grew along the roadway. There was a calmness in the outlying meadows and broken woods which made her present annoyances seem impalpable, remote, as though past slights had been largely a matter of inverted ego.

She had come to a turn in the road when she saw a man approaching her from the thicket a few rods ahead. She stopped short surprised, realising there was something familiar in the broad shoulders and heavy build. An instant later she recognised the intruder was Mr. Jordan Buel.

VI

"Not so tight . . . you're choking me. . . . Jordan, stop kissing for a moment and tell me how you got here? How did you know where I was?"

Mr. Buel did not release her, but after holding her in his arms for a few minutes his passion seemed to make way for more coherence. He attempted to answer her questions while his eyes played over her and he watched her face from different angles as an expert appraiser views some beautiful object of intricate workmanship.

"I followed you," he admitted laconically.

"You mean you were on the same train with us from Paris?"

"Yes. But I lost you at Rennes."

"What did you do?"

"I asked the guard who your friends were but he didn't know them. Who is this Frenchman?"

"Never mind now. Where are you stopping?"

"A place called St. Lo. I've sent for my chauffeur and I'm there with the car. He's down the road further. I came up the drive quietly to sort of investigate on my own."

"You great big boy!"

"You gave the old lady the sack? I knew you had a quarrel. I called at the Meurice next morning and they told me you had left for Gare Montparnasse. That's how I followed."

He crushed her hands in his.

"Jordan, you hurt."

"Where's my ring?"

"Here, in my blouse. It's on a ribbon."

"Why aren't you wearing it?"

"Because it looks rather out of place here."

"Oh, it does."

"Well, I haven't told Edith I'm engaged. So if I were suddenly to appear with it on it would attract attention. As it is I am considered a sort of adventuress. At least I wear it when I am alone in my room."

"Wear it now."

Miss Cass obeyed and then remarked:

"I know you're thinking about Monsieur de Lanel. I haven't refrained from wearing it because I didn't want *him* to know I'm engaged, so don't do anything so stupid as to be jealous. I have difficulties enough as it is."

"Difficulties?"

It occurred to her that Madame de Lanel might appear any moment in the lane and finding her in the arms of a stranger would be sufficient offence for permanent expulsion. With this in mind she led the way into the woods. Under foot was an accumulation of leaves that had rotted, covering the ground with a spongy carpet like heavy pile. Coarse bracken grew thick about them and wild ivy festooned itself from limb to limb, and on the tree stems were attached occasional round moles of vivid leek-green moss. When they were out of earshot of the drive Helena halted and after a glance at the damp ivy and her perishable draperies, as though deliberately deciding to ruin her dress, she seated herself on the ground.

"I've told you my position," she said at length. "What on earth am I to do?"

Mr. Buel pondered that.

"I've subscribed to the Paris edition of the *New York Herald*," she went on, "and I'm following the arrivals of every hotel to see if someone doesn't come along that I know to whom I may attach myself. If I were only a nobody or past the marrying age it wouldn't matter, but I am too prominent to be wandering about Europe alone. Haven't you a suggestion?"

"Of course. Marry me."

"Here? In France? Where it can't be done inside of two months, and one has to have one's birth certificate

vouched for by the American Consul, and one's parents' marriage certificate and what not. . . ."

"Then in London by a private register."

"No, Jordan. When I do marry you it's going to be with my family about me and all the evidences of respectability, not after the manner of a housemaid. I'm not going to spend the rest of my life explaining why I did it. I've seen the results of that before. You and I are not going to begin life under a cloud."

Then following a moment's silence she sprang up.

"Jordan, I've an idea. I'll return to the house now and you drive up in a few minutes in your car and we'll meet before Edith's eyes as though for the first time to-day. I shall introduce you as a family friend from America and you will begin an immediate flirtation with her. She will be so flattered she will endure me for a week or so simply for the satisfaction of making me look ridiculous in your eyes. In the meantime something will turn up for me as a way out. Promise to ignore me. The entire success depends upon that."

"I'll do my best," he agreed.

Helena turned abruptly, left him and made her way back to the drive. Reaching the house, she entered the music room where Madame de Lanel was engaged above her tapestry frame in an attempt to perfect herself in the arts of a French gentlewoman. A moment later a motor car was heard outside. With elaborate unconcern Miss Cass glanced through the windows and felt a quickening of satisfaction as she noted the perfection of the machine at the door. Then she exclaimed:

"Why, it's Mr. Buel!"

He entered presently and she extended her hand, remarking:

"I *am* glad to see you. When did you come? I want you and Madame de Lanel to meet."

She watched the introduction with trepidation, aware of a certain inelastic quality of mind which characterised Mr. Buel and which made it unlikely that he could put through

their intriguing with any degree of success. His eyes turned toward Madame de Lanel a second time, and he exclaimed impulsively:

"This is a pleasure."

Miss Cass saw a tinge of colour flush the woman's cheek for a moment, as he continued to press her hand and Helena realised that she had misjudged the potency of the mere masculine unit. Mr. Buel's clumsy efforts at flattery had been too pleasing for Edith to doubt their genuineness. After all, she mused, as she watched the two engaged in a somewhat furtive conversation across the room, nothing could be more deleterious to character than living in an atmosphere where the truth was always under suspicion.

After a few minutes she recognised a glint of anger in Edith's eyes and wondered what Mr. Buel had done to occasion it. She rose and selected a chair nearer to them, thinking to include herself in their remarks, fearing Jordan's jealousy might overdo the situation. She could see Madame de Lanel's manner was openly hostile and seemed to predicate immediate disaster. Her eyes were fastened upon Helena where she sat before her, her hands resting on the arms of her chair. Instantly she realised what had happened. In her hurried return to the house she had forgotten to remove the preposterous ring. The navette-shaped diamond glittering on the third finger of her left hand had caught Madame de Lanel's attention, and her shrewd mind had deducted something very like the truth. Mr. Buel was the girl's fiancé and was attempting to claim the attention of her hostess in order to become a welcome guest. The divination of a plot between them enraged her, so that when she asked him if he would remain to luncheon it was with such truculence of manner that he hastily declined.

"I didn't know it was so late," he remarked as he rose, following her example. "It took longer to motor here from St. Lo than I realised. Can't we have a picnic some day this week? You and Miss Cass, Monsieur de Lanel and myself. How would to-morrow be? One can make

the trip from here to Mount St. Michael in my car, my chauffeur says, in something over two hours, and I believe there's rather a famous inn there for lunch."

"Unfortunately my husband is quite an invalid this summer, so that I shall have to decline for Tristram. He would find the trip too tiring."

"But you and Miss Cass will accept?"

"I'm needed here, but don't let me in any way hinder your plans."

"Naturally I wouldn't think of going without you, Edith," Helena replied.

"And why not?"

"Because little as you may suspect it, I have some regard for the proprieties myself. And in such things one is rather more particular in France than anywhere else."

"But you are not French, so what possible difference does that make? You are an American and your countrywomen are privileged characters here. They can do the most amazing things without causing the slightest comment. And then again it isn't as though you knew anyone or had a position to maintain in France. You're a stranger, a tourist, so why shouldn't you do as you please? You are foolish to refuse for such reasons if you wish to go. I'm sorry you won't stay to luncheon, Mr. Buel. You'll excuse me."

As she spoke the last words she left the room to cross the hall and tap on the door of Monsieur de Lanel's study.

"I've simply got her mad. My work must have been pretty lumpy."

"Hush!"

"Will you come to-morrow?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"I can't see any reason. At what time?"

"Be here at eleven o'clock. And now go."

The arrangements were made and agreed to as though the picnic were a conspiracy. And the next morning, prompt to the fraction of a minute, the cut-out snorting like some wild beast to escape capture, the long, low swung car

bounded up the drive and remained purring while Helena came out of the house and was handed in.

She thought, as she took her seat beside him, that she had never seen him look so happy, or his great frame of such immense proportions as in his flannels.

"How are things this morning?" he asked.

"I don't know. I haven't seen her. I searched the house over before leaving to say good-bye but Edith is always inaccessible. Marie said she was not in her room, so I suppose she was hiding."

"Let's forget her for one day."

And then the car took the decline as though volplaning as it slid down the long stretch, not slackening in its speed until they approached the turn where it joined the country road.

"I had forgotten there was such a sensation left in the world. I will never be satisfied to do anything slowly again. Your car's a darling."

"Think of the good times you've missed!"

She put both hands to her head to fasten more securely the little burnt straw hat she was wearing, and to restrain her ballooning veil behind her. She was smiling now, her eyes a-dance, her lips parted showing a row of white teeth, small, even and sharp as cuttle fish. Mr. Buel stooped suddenly, caught her tight in his arms and kissed her.

"Please."

"Well, I've wanted to do that ever since I've got into the car."

"Suppose the chauffeur were to turn around?"

"He has instructions to keep his eyes on the road ahead. That's why I'm not driving."

"I *am* glad I came."

Mr. Buel laughed; he was holding her hand.

"Familiarity breeds contentment," he agreed.

Fields spread out beside them and then seemed to dissolve in their flight. To Helena it appeared that the car was not moving, so even was their progress that it seemed more reasonable that the long white ribbon of the road was

retreating under their wheels. Although the heat was already intense their speed created its own temperature. They passed motorists headed for Rennes like shadows, and at such times they sat rigidly apart from each other.

They slackened their pace while passing through the town of Contances, with its blistering white walls and only occasional shade and were quickening along an open stretch of road when the forward wheel of the car struck a broken bottle, unnoticed in the dust. A report like a pistol shot followed, the car lurched drunkenly from side to side and was brought to a standstill by the edge of the road. Helena and Mr. Buel remained in their seats while a new tire was substituted, fanning themselves against choking dust and unremitting heat. No one passed them and in the deserted country there was no sound but the ominous rattle of locusts.

At length once more in progress they continued with greater caution through the villages of Folligny and Hage-Pasner. But having been delayed it was after one o'clock when they drew into Avranches and Mr. Buel ordered the chauffeur to stop on the terrace where they had their first uninterrupted view of Mount St. Michael. The island lay before them separated from the mainland by smooth flats laid bare by receding tides, St. Michael itself connected by a causeway. It looked oddly as though an entire mediæval city had been drowned in the channel and only this eminence had risen above the waters, its perpendicular sides crowded with huddled tile roofs and spires. It was at once as imaginative and unreal as a Doré.

As the car remained unprotected from the sun the heat blew over them like a breath from a furnace. At the rear of the hotel were unoccupied cars and within the d'Angleterre came the clatter of dishes of innumerable trippers being served.

"You'd rather lunch here," he said, "than wait till we reach the island. Our being late is going to make our time very limited."

"Then let's go on. I am starved," Helena admitted, "but

it looks so picturesque I can hold out ten minutes longer, and it can't be over half a mile away."

They descended the height which skirted the Bay and were about to run onto the causeway when a returning car signalled wildly. Mr. Buel saw that the occupants were countrymen of his and instructed the chauffeur to see what they wanted. He returned in a moment with the information that the causeway had broken down and no car could get across.

"Well, I'm not going to walk. That's out of the question."

A French labourer was passing them, and as Mr. Buel admired Miss Cass's linguistic facilities he suggested she ask him to confirm the report. After the man's volubility and gesticulations had subsided she turned to her fiancé.

"He says it was wrecked in the storm here last week. The second time it has given away in over thirty years, but they think in two or three days to have it restored. In the meantime no car can get over."

The chauffeur having heard the reply now started the motor running slowly on its course.

"Where are you going, Williams?"

"I can make it, sir, if you are willing I should try."

"How do you mean?"

"Across the sand."

"That's quicksand. You can't go that way. It's dangerous. I've read about it."

"You see there are fishermen. If they can get there on two feet, I can get there in this car. And there's a woman washing in a stream. I can do what any woman can."

They looked for a moment fascinated by the great expanse of shining sand, upon which the tides had left tangled skeins of seaweed and grass, bits of shell and dead crabs.

"How can you get down there?"

"I see a place further on."

"It's up to you, Helena. Are you afraid?"

"Afraid. Of course not. I'm only thinking of the machine."

"Hang the machine. All right, Williams. Drive carefully."

"Yes, sir."

Then before they realised what he intended doing, the car had turned abruptly, backed and facing Mount St. Michael was driven at full speed off the embankment. They had a moment of terror in which Buel dragged her into his arms and she covered her eyes as the car flew through space and then landing on the sand began a desperate race across the flats.

The moist sand shone like a mirror, but above the purr of the car they heard the sucking of it on the tires like hungry lips, in the treacherous seeping and bubbling beneath them. Fishermen watched their crazy flight. Labourers at work on the causeway whistled and shouted to them. But the car sped on and the chauffeur never lifted his head to answer the clamour. He bent over the wheel, his eyes watching through the glass every inch of the track before them. He noticed every depression in the sand, every hillock, as he guided them across and drew them up breathless, thrilled, at the foot of the wall which surrounds the island rock.

"What a ride," Helena exclaimed.

As she looked back she saw that the wheels had sunken deeper than they realised and they had taken a greater chance than they knew. A number of idlers had come running to the edge of the wall to watch the adventurers.

One of them exclaimed that this was the first car to cross the sand. And upon Helena's translating the remark Mr. Buel informed the inscrutable chauffeur, now busily examining his radiator.

"That's what I thought, sir," he answered succinctly.

"Be here, ready and waiting for us, Williams, in an hour and a half. Now go up to the Hotel Poulard and get a good lunch."

"Yes, sir."

Helena and Mr. Buel, surrounded by the curious and ad-

miring, made the ascent up the steep, tortuous street to the flagged entrance of the inn. Here Miss Cass absented herself to remove all travel stains, while Mr. Buel ordered luncheon served under a pergola hidden in creepers which overhung the Bay.

The absence of tourists who had perforce remained at Avranches, added curiosity to their advent and the few guests received the strangers with wonder and speculation. Helena's laughter and high spirits seemed to resonate and their relationship was soon decided. They ate heartily the *moules marinières*, roast chicken, salad and omelette soufflé served out of doors with the sound of water in their ears. Before them was the silhouette of the mainland, the town blurred by heat haze under a sky of scurrying masses of cumulous cloud.

"Come! We mustn't waste another minute here if you want to look about the island before we leave," Mr. Buel said at last.

And so reluctantly they made their way up the steps to the buttressed abbey which crowns the rock. They had hoped to elude the attention of a too persistent guide but he was waiting for them and pulled open the heavy door as they approached. They remained unmindful to the history of its destruction and restoration and the usual anecdotes. But when he lighted a candle to show them the dungeons beneath the monastery, Mr. Buel betrayed his first real interest.

"I want to see those," he said with genuine enthusiasm.

They were led into a dark corridor; down a flight of steep stairs. Allowing the guide to precede them, he grasped her in his arms with such violence he all but lifted her off her feet.

"Jordan!"

"What's the matter? Have I hurt you?"

"No. Not *hurt* exactly, but . . ."

"But what?"

"You shouldn't do that."

"Why not?"

He was kissing her now, but she managed to break away from him as the guide returned.

"You can go on, *Allez*—if we want to know anything we'll call you back. *Comprenez?*"

"*Parfaitement, monsieur.*"

And the guide continued ahead with the candle, leaving them in almost total darkness.

"It was for a moment like this that I prepared the entire trip," Mr. Buel explained.

"But it wouldn't have been possible with Edith along."

"I should have got rid of her in some way. Thank God, she didn't come. Nell, are you always going to love me?"

"How do I know?"

"You're not a bit reassuring."

"I really want to see the rest of these dungeons."

And later, as they passed a deep subterranean entrance to a lower tier they stood looking into the nether darkness breathing the damp, earthy smell. The guide had returned to them, his candle half consumed. They had retraced their steps and were about to mount the rough hewn stairs which led back to the body of the abbey, when from overhead there came a deafening crash.

They stopped in their ascent. The explosion was so loud it seemed as though the monastery itself was bursting above their heads.

"What was that?"

"He says it's thunder," Helena answered, as the guide continued to mount.

"You mean it's a storm?"

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

As he extinguished the candle and pulled open the door they saw the realisation of his words. The sinuous alley was black and rain was falling like a downpour of steel needles. The little footway ran with water.

Mr. Buel grasped Helena's arm with a grip that hurt.

"It means run," he cried.

Before she knew it he was propelling her down the steep steps. She was wearing high-heeled, unserviceable

shoes in which she slipped and stumbled in her mad descent, but he did not release his hold or slacken his pace. In the haste and semi-darkness she could not see where her next step would fall.

Suddenly a skeleton ribbed with lightning appeared against the clouds, shook its fist defiantly, passed a white shadow over all the darkness, and vanished leaving a deafening discharge of thunder in their ears.

As they reached the wall they saw the car in its place, impatient, throbbing to be off. The bonnet was up, their chauffeur in his seat, his cap pulled over his eyes, his bare hands on the wheel. With Helena within and Mr. Buel's foot on the running board he gave the directions.

"Go like the devil!" was all he said.

The motor car, like some trained animal of bone and sinew, sprang forward. It shot along the sand, while another clap of thunder passed over their heads. Under the bonnet Mr. Buel did not speak. Helena's first intimation of danger was when a flash of lightning revealed his face to her. She saw it was grey with stiff lips.

A sound had suddenly risen as though conjured up by magic and she saw all about them the incoming tide. She remembered reading that the tide which covered the flats half the time, separating Mount St. Michael from the mainland, could exceed galloping horses. But she had never supposed it was anything like this. Already it had blotted out the sand in front. It passed like a sponge over their tracks behind. It was frothing, gurgling; waves like monsters were angrily showing their teeth. They had gone only a quarter of the distance although the car was geared to the third speed. The water was close to the running board. In a moment the tool chest would be submerged.

"Turn back! Turn back!" Mr. Buel cried hoarsely.

But the car continued on.

The chauffeur had flashed on the searchlights. Over the angry surf risen menacingly, they played. This wall, glistening, luminous, which blocked them, was like some black volcanic action. And then its stiffness broke, surging and

impalpable, only to rise again in terrifying assault. Helena realised the danger, but she did not speak. She could not make herself heard above the storm. She was horror-stricken by its violence. For a second she closed her eyes so as not to see its imminence intensified by the light ahead. And at that moment the light was cut off.

She realised at once what had happened. The storage battery just above the running board had been reached. The water had risen to that point depriving them of light. The storm, the surrounding water, seemed elements all at once removed from her. Her thoughts clung persistently to all the more discreditable moments in her life. She was not thinking of her peril nor of her chances of escape, nor yet of the man beside her, but of her mother at home. She was wishing she might have been the means of bringing her greater comfort. That she had at all times shown Annis as much consideration as it was in her power to do. But these thoughts were torn aside.

"Turn back, damn you! Turn back! Don't you see what you're doing!"

The car was making less headway. The hind wheels failing of any grip revolved uselessly, churning water. Flashes of lightning followed each other so as to be almost continuous. For the first time Helena noticed that the causeway seemed to be moving with them. She had selected a portion of broken masonry she could distinguish ahead of them. After several seconds they were not perceptibly nearer to it.

"Go back! Do you hear me? Or by God I'll . . ."

A report of thunder came so close that she fancied the causeway had been hit.

All at once the chauffeur realised his mistake. He had attempted the impossible. He stopped the car. For an instant he hesitated, thinking to turn. Then he realised that could not be done. He reversed and they backed toward the island on first speed. The floor boards were wet. The water was now spouting up through the clutch. There was a great sputtering and pulsing from the engine. They con-

tinued to back seemingly an inch at a time. Their progress was almost imperceptible, and then ceased.

The car under them was fighting like a creature being strangled. Its whole body quivered for breath. It made heroic attempts to move. The water had only to rise a few inches more and they were powerless. If it reached the ignition generator the engine would go cold. Nothing could help them then. It was like watching something die.

She looked at her lover's face, fascinated by the terror of it. She wondered if she looked like that. He was afraid for her sake. But she was not afraid. If this were death she knew she would not shame herself in any paroxysm of fear.

It seemed minutes later that the machine was once more moving. They were creeping through water that hit against the side of the car audibly. She wondered if Williams, unable to see where he was going, had not lost all sense of direction. She realised suddenly they could not make it. Their progress was a matter of inches.

Again they stopped. The carburetor or coils had been reached. Some vital organ was paralysed. She felt the water on the floor of the car but did not think to lift her feet. Even though he could get the engine going she knew it would be useless. . . . The next wave washed over the door, drenching her. The car settled. She realised what that meant. They had struck the quicksand.

Helena was amazed that she could no longer distinguish anything. The rain was coming down in a curtain of violence that blinded all view from them. It was beating in under the bonnet. Buel tore open the door, letting in a wash of water.

"We've got to swim," he cried in her face. "Don't let your feet touch bottom, or it's death."

He did not pronounce the more dreaded word, but she understood. He was at her side, on the running board, then struck out. She followed him. The cold water caught her breath as she laid herself upon it and began an impeded stroke. Each wave broke over her face. She persevered

for several minutes. She felt she was stationary. She was a good swimmer and not tired. She reminded herself it was a long distance and she was using too much effort. She curbed nervousness. Her stroke became even, methodical. Her arms were tired. It wasn't fancy or terror. She was weighted with clothes. She knew suddenly she had reached almost her capacity. She was without breath to call.

At that moment a hand was thrust forcibly under her chin. . . . And she continued as in a dream. Movements of arms and feet . . . slowly . . . again . . . again . . . again. Later an arm encircled her waist. She relaxed entirely, gave up. At length she was aware the struggle was over. She opened her eyes. Buel's face was above hers. He was carrying her in his arms, his feet on the ground. The water was now only breast high. Before them were the lights of the island. She smiled. Vaguely she realised what he had done, but she was too exhausted for gratitude. Experiencing a faint sense of well-being she closed them again and let her head sink toward him.

Never was there such strength in the world, she thought, detached, fragmentarily, as she resigned herself to his care. She was conscious of the sinew of his arms through his wet sleeves. He continued to bear her dead weight against the surge of water. Then nothing seemed to matter and she was at rest.

Reaching shore he laid her on the rocks and called to the chauffeur. He continued to call. There was no answer. Then he went back, disappearing in the rain. She heard more shouting. He was giving direction to the miserable Williams to get men to drag the car out of the water with ropes.

She was cold now. She had managed to rise. Her teeth were chattering.

"Shall we walk across," she asked, as he reached her side.

"Walk? You must be crazy. The causeway isn't safe."

"Then how am I going to get back?"

Mr. Buel looked at the eddying water churning beneath them like boiling milk before he answered:

"You can't get back to-night."

VII

It was past the noon hour next day when Miss Cass leapt from Mr. Buel's car and running across the turf, mounted the verandah steps and opened the house door. Madame de Lanel was probably in the music room, she concluded, as she found the library deserted. Since there was no one there, however, she hesitated before continuing her investigations.

She had left her fiancé with scant ceremony, vetoing his suggestion that he assist her with her explanation to her host and hostess. She knew she was about to face an unpleasant quarter of an hour; the facts were not plausible, but at least she wished to tell her own story in her own way.

She would recount it breathlessly, she decided, attempting to make light of no detail. But since she would assure them that the *contretemps* had resulted in no evil consequences as they had seen no one whom they knew and had made use of fictitious names, all was well. She rang for the parlour-maid and after some detention that functionary appeared.

In reply to Miss Cass's question she was informed that 'Monsieur 'dame' had driven to Rennes and would not return before evening. Helena's first sensation was one of disappointment. She had rehearsed the story and wished to recount it while it was still fresh. All its ingeniousness would be lost in a delay of five hours. It would appear stupid and sordid enough when stripped of her telling as an occurrence just passed. The essentials and effects seemed already to have eluded her, so that what was intended to be passed off as a prank and escapade, now began to appear ugly and sinister.

Helena went to her room, removed her hat and looked

steadfastly in the mirror at her reflection. After a few moments of silent scrutiny she decided that she was glad they were away. Her clothes had become drenched in the storm and were now discoloured and shapeless. The sleeve of her chiffon blouse had been torn by Mr. Buel when he had attempted to wrest her from the machine. Her face was haggard after a sleepless night and dark rings encircled her eyes.

She bathed, brushed her hair, threw herself down upon her bed and at length slept from exhaustion. When she awoke the afternoon was over. Recoiffed, she selected a dinner dress which suited her and went downstairs to await the arrival of the de Lanels. Taking a volume of Châteaubriand from the bookshelves she settled herself in a deep chair and pretended to read. She wished to look casual and since she was living in the Châteaubriand country, her choice of authors was not an infliction. In reality the book did not hold her attention, for she was rehearsing her story with growing uneasiness, while she listened for carriage wheels.

A few moments later dinner was announced and she rose, crossed the hall, crushing any hypersensitiveness as she stiffened to a cooler atmosphere. The Lanels had not seen fit to send her any message of their arrival and she was evidently to meet them at table. As she entered the dining room she saw that a cover had been laid for only one. When she questioned Baptiste, the *valet-de-pied*, she was told the hour of their return was so uncertain she was not expected to delay dinner.

Suddenly she was gripped by a thought which shook her. Suppose the Marquise de Lanel refused to return to the château so long as she remained there? The very idea was like the pressure of ice upon her brain. She attempted to cast off any such foreboding with the easy sophistry that there were limits even to the treachery of a friend. Edith wouldn't stoop to any such disingenuous methods. But, as the thought formed in her mind, she found herself totally without measure to gauge her hostess's actions. Her

acquaintance with Miss Doelger in the past had been limited almost entirely to that lady's protestations on paper. Before the present Marquise de Lanel's predispositions she was helpless in any effort at analysis.

As the possible result of any such act amplified itself, she realised how complete was her intrapment. She felt a moment's constriction in her breathing. She had supplied Madame de Lanel with an escapade which the woman could shape to her own advantage. The wires being down she had been unable to communicate in any way from St. Michael. Nor was it surprising that Edith was not disposed to believe the facts since she had remained away all night. It was annoying, she argued, that all her life the most untoward circumstances seemed naturally to gravitate to her.

She consulted her watch. It was ten o'clock. She put down her book on the *canapé*. There was no use in simulation now. She remained rigid; in thought.

Her mind went back to what had very likely been a plan from the first. Her impatience rose at her credulity in acceding to the scheme to go alone with Mr. Buel. Edith had been looking for the means of evicting her, and now she had supplied her with the necessary evidence. The woman's construction of what really happened would be her excuse for making it impossible for her to return home until her guest signified her intention of leaving.

Following the meal, eaten alone, she returned to the library and the pretence of her book. What more was Edith planning now? And what was to follow? That their delay was intentional she knew, but just what form her hostess's incivility would take she could not forecast.

At length her thoughts drifted from the de Lanels back to Jordan Buel and the hours which had followed their discovery that they could not return to the mainland that night. Back at the inn Mr. Buel had registered as "William Jordan and Miss Jordan, New York." Supposedly brother and sister. They had been assigned rooms side by side. She would have preferred to have been given a room in one

of their dependencies, but could not ask for it without arousing suspicion. And so she had gone to her room, removed her clothes and lain there in bed while her own garments were dried before the great oven downstairs. They had been rather subdued at dinner and later, the rain having ceased, they had taken a short walk and at nine thirty she had gone upstairs for the night. For a long time she remained musing. When she thought to look at the clock again it lacked a few minutes to midnight.

She rose abruptly, went into the hall, opened the house door and stepped out onto the terrace. The stillness of the night was all-encompassing. It was difficult to realise that less than fifty miles away a storm had ravaged the coast. She crossed the carriage-sweep and looked down the drive. There was no sign of an approaching vehicle. Above the stars looked small and lusterless in a pale summer sky. The silence on her return was cavernous. There came a sudden twitching in a nearby plane tree. She suspected it was a squirrel she had attempted to make friends with a few days before. She reascended the step to the terrace and walked to the rear of the château. As she lingered there she noticed a light in the stable some distance away and heard a cow's dismal moo.

She remained standing, her mind a blank. After a moment she was conscious she was not alone. Turning she saw that Baptiste was waiting at a respectful distance. She asked if there was anything wrong at the stable, and he replied simply that he suspected that one of the cows was calving.

Miss Cass realised suddenly that he was waiting to lock the doors. She said good-night casually, and a moment later she heard him closing the jalousies as she climbed the stairs to her room.

She did not sleep easily that night. In fact, she thought she had scarcely closed her eyes when, opening them, she saw the sunlight, and realised that several hours had been lost. At ten she rang for her breakfast, which was brought on a tray to her bedside. Miss Cass felt she was more or

less an object of scrutiny to the servants. Glancing up from her coffee and roll, she asked if Madame would appear at luncheon downstairs. It was as near a direct question as she cared to ask if they had returned home. But the maid discreetly dropped her eyes and replied that she did not know.

Miss Cass remained in her room all morning. It was past the noon hour when, descending the stairs, she heard someone playing. She waited irresolute on the landing until the last notes of the Chaminade etude ended, then with her features under control she entered the music room. She found her hostess's manner as she rose from the piano scarcely colder or more prohibitory than usual, and Helena took heart, and with an infectious chuckle launched into her explanation of her absence. She felt a purely feminine regret that Monsieur de Lanel was not there; she knew instinctively that her own prepossessions would incline him to accept her story favorably.

"I don't know what you've thought of me, Edith, unless you've heard of the storm. But it couldn't be at all the same thing here as on the water. The causeway was broken and we couldn't get back. It was annoying, but what could we——"

"Please, not a word, here is Tristram."

"But I insist! I must explain."

Miss Cass remained flushed but impenitent.

"It isn't necessary. It would grieve him, and if you wish me to speak very plainly, it would shock him too. Frenchmen don't look upon such things the way American men are taught to do. And for myself I don't care to hear it. You have your own code of what is becoming and of course you must live up to that."

No further reference was ever made to her night at Mount St. Michael, but Miss Cass often felt that Madame de Lanel had supplied a different story to her husband. She used to watch his eyes follow her when she entered a room, and experienced a curious sensation of guilt, but she was allowed no opportunity to reopen the subject.

Supposing that Helena had been able to make her peace by that time, Jordan Buel motored over from St. Lo two days later. After inquiring to see the two ladies, Madame de Lanel sent down word she was not at home, and Miss Cass, wishing to remove all thought of duplicity, insisted upon seeing him on the terrace. She remained directly beneath the sitting-room windows, conscious that the Marquise was observing them from behind curtains. She was uncommunicative to a degree, and did not raise the veil she was wearing. Mr. Buel attempted to lighten her depression, but the word was not vouchsafed him whereby they could reascend to the ease of past intercourse. He saw she was worried, and after ten minutes, in which he had been unable to extract anything but monosyllables from her, Miss Cass begged him to leave, so as not to complicate conditions already acute.

"I've got to leave by the end of the week," she declared. "It is just a question of *where* I shall go."

After the snort of his car was no longer heard and the querulous sound of his horn died away, she recalled the recent advent of the calf and walked idly toward the stable. Her host had taken her on a tour of inspection, showing her his horses, the splendid work-animals and the bullocks in the paddock, shortly after her arrival. This attention had been more the result of seeming to apologize for Edith's hours of absenting herself. He had been conscious that their guest had been denied the usual sources of entertainment, but at length had given up all efforts to provide for her amusement, since it was a duty in no way shared by his wife.

Miss Cass entered the stables feeling that she knew her way about them. The floor of the carriage-house was sanded in horticultural and zoological patterns, an art which was the delight of a stable helper. Along the walls behind glass doors hung the harness for the various traps, all spotless, nickel and silver bits gleaming. She made her way out into the court, where beneath the stable clock and weather-vane the box stalls faced each other in a wide

rectangle. Beyond was a paddock to which various stalls had access, and, passing through one, where the half-door was open, she found a stable lad laying fresh straw. He told her in his strange patois that the calf was "out yonder." Against the bars stood the cow, her pelt cream colour and white and soft to Helena's hand. Her great earnest eyes glowed like immense garnets and in their liquid depths Helena saw herself reflected. The cow regarded her a moment in doubt while she sniffed at her skirt, then exhaled her warm breath, fragrant of grass. The calf was on its knees beneath its mother and made petulant sounds because the teats were not longaged for its convenience, so as to reach them without rising. Helena stooped to stroke the new-born animal, and the calf took one of her pink fingers in its mouth and attempted to wring sustenance from it.

"Oh, you darling," she exclaimed aloud.

When she arose a moment later she noticed that the Marquis was an observer. He was dressed in riding clothes, which he frequently wore all day, never changing until dinner. He was observing her with a shade more interest than he had ever shown, through a near-sighted, single eye-glass.

Miss Cass, who accommodated herself to country life with less effort than the average Parisienne, was wearing a dress of white flannel, deck shoes and a Homburg hat. The Marquis was aware that she made a not unattractive picture.

"You are really interested in cattle, aren't you?" he asked skeptically.

"Yes, indeed. I enjoy the usual abysmal ignorance of the American woman, but I'm really interested in all things—all things, but one."

"And what can that be?"

"Human nature!"

Monsieur de Lanet smiled.

"Why that point of view?"

"I'm awful tired of my own kind; there's something wonderful in the loyalty of animals."

She continued to stroke the cow's silken hide. The calf, embarrassed by too close attention, had struggled up insecurely and sidled off, as though on stilts, moving unsteadily on over-long, stiff legs.

"And people? Why these aspersions against your own countrywomen? I suppose you mean them? I've found your countrywomen most intelligent."

"Of course Edith is an exception," she remarked negligently. "But we are amazingly ignorant. I am thinking only of the fashionable women of America. *Nous ne savons rien de rien*. We want only the best without even recognising it when we see it. We don't know art or music, or even pearls, as French women do. We don't take an intelligent interest in politics, like Englishwomen; nor do we know flowers or gardens. We keep gardeners to tell us the names of the blooms in our own greenhouses. We don't know cattle, although the greatest herds in the world are in America, and most of the fortunes in the West are derived from them. . . . But—yes, we will spend hours discussing the construction of a dress. We pride ourselves upon our understanding of dress."

"You are prejudiced against the charm of your own ladies."

Conscious of having hit off the frailties of her hostess too accurately, she sought to divert his attention.

"Look," she exclaimed, "that precious baby is mixing his front legs with his hind ones."

At a short distance all four legs of the calf had become crossed like a camp-chair and it sent up a little quaver of distress to its mother. But the cow continued placidly to revolve the grass in its mouth, not to be concerned by such puerilities. And the calf, suddenly disentangling its legs, moved a little nearer. Later returning to the warm maternal flanks it pressed its head against its mother's udder and closed its eyes with gratification.

Miss Cass and de Lanel walked away to the other end of the paddock.

"Take the case of Bébé's father," he said, and she thought he made use of the *petit* name as a means of avoiding the difficulty in pronouncing the "th" in Edith. "He is quite a celebrated savant in America, I understand."

"Savant." She repeated the word blankly. "He made his money in the manufacture of starch."

For a moment neither spoke. Then the Marquis was at haste to continue:

"Of course I know that."

She realised in a moment that this was a version of his father-in-law's accumulation which he had never heard before. His expression of disappointment was not at the source of their fortune but at Edith's having lied. His argument suddenly lost pith and he remained silent.

They were aroused a moment later by the appearance of Madame de Lanel. Edith had effected the Parisienne's helplessness in matters of *le sport*. Ordinarily she satisfied her passion for tennis or golf by strolling over well-trimmed turf, carrying a racket or a machie with a *nécessaire* stocked with a mirror and make-up requisites. To-day Madame de Lanel lifted her draperies above the heavy bedding of straw and opened the half door with the use of two immaculate jewelled fingers.

"The post has just come," she said. "It has brought several letters for you, Tristram. I put them in your study."

Without a word he left obediently and made his way back to the château.

The Marquise turned to survey Helena.

"What were you talking about?" she asked.

For a moment Miss Cass did not reply and the two women confronted each other silently as though measuring their weapons.

"We were speaking of the patrician qualities of certain cattle," she answered.

Madame de Lanel smiled.

"I am glad you have a taste in common. I'm so stupid about the stable, and now that the groom of the chambers is away, Tristram has no one to talk to about such matters. I know you don't mind my saying this. It is *sans rancune*, of course."

"Oh, *sans rancune*, by all means."

Madame de Lanel raised a diminutive square of scented mauve lawn to her nostrils as though to rid her of any reminder of the stable, and then picked her way back as she had come.

Miss Cass remained in the paddock, puzzled. She was unable to account for the forbearance in Madame de Lanel's retort. Ever since her return she had been waiting for some form of punishment that was being withheld. She had hoped to face her flaying the next morning and have it over. She realised suddenly the curiously withdrawn manner and guarded speech of the Marquise boded evil. She could afford to do her guest no further injury since she had already seen to that the night she spent at Rennes. Her *coup* was launched. And she was waiting to have its effect reach its victim. Nothing else could explain her calm eyes and compressed lips. She was waiting. At the thought Helena's fear increased because the sources of detriment were unknown.

She had told Jordan Buel she must leave by the end of the week. Accordingly on the tenth day following her excursion she was seated in her room repacking her trunk when she saw a carriage coming up the drive. She was on her knees in front of the window and noticed suddenly that it held an occupant beside the coachman. A woman, but not the Marquise. She remained speculating as to her identity. It was not until the carriage stopped, and the lady was assisted to alight, that she saw with amazement that the visitor was her mother.

VIII

So great was her surprise that at first a feeling of fear, almost of paralysis, kept her from movement. Then she rose, tore open the door to her room to run down the passage. She found her mother already on the landing on her way up to her.

Helena gave a little cry of delight and apprehension.

"Mother, what is it? What has happened?"

Their embrace was silent. Mrs. Cass looked at her daughter earnestly and in that single scrutiny knew Helena had changed in some impalpable way. It was not that she made no effort to conceal her present unhappiness; she was diffident; her first impression was that she and her daughter had grown strangely apart, and Helena's unhappiness was no trivial matter.

They climbed the stairs in silence and entered Miss Cass's room and her mother closed the door behind them.

"Mother, tell me, is anyone ill?"

"No, dear."

"Has anything gone wrong at home?"

"No."

"But if everyone's well I don't understand. Why are you here?"

"I am here because I was cabled for."

"Who cabled?"

"Madame de Lanel. She sent a message over a week ago asking that I come and fetch you, because your conduct with Mr. Buel was such that she could not be responsible for you any longer."

"She sent those words over the wires?"

"Yes."

Helena gripped her fingers together and then tore them apart in a moment of uncontrollable anger.

"That woman is a fearful bounder," she cried. "She only did it out of jealousy of me. It isn't Jordan she objects to but Monsieur de Lanel. She is jealous of his smallest attentions to me, and he only persists in them because of her discourtesy."

"The message in itself explains the woman, but I wonder her husband allowed it."

"What could he do?"

"I should have thought he would have remonstrated."

"What could he say? What could anybody say? Very likely he didn't know it. After all he's only a man and men are all alike. Men only differ in their wives."

She threw herself vigorously on the bed, her shoulders shaking convulsively, her face buried in the pillows.

"Helena, Helena," Mrs. Cass expostulated. "This isn't like you. You aren't *crying*!"

She spoke with real alarm, for it was years since she had seen her daughter cry.

Helena sat up shamefacedly.

"No, I'm not, but it's only because I don't know how," she confessed as she gave a rueful twisted smile. "I'd like to. I'd like to howl."

"How long is it going to take you to finish your packing? I told the carriage to wait. If you hurry we can take it back to Rennes and stop there for the night. It is impossible for either of us to remain here."

Twenty minutes later her trunks packed and carried downstairs, Helena made inquiries to see Madame de Lanel and bade her good-bye, but was told she was "not at home" and Monsieur le Marquis was riding and his return uncertain.

"Naturally she would remain under cover before you, Mater. I suppose she's in her own room now behind locked doors."

"Why should you want to meet her?"

"I don't. Except that I despise a coward. If I ever stooped to so low a method, I would at least face it. Anyway I haven't forgotten my breeding," she said as she was

handed into the carriage beside her mother and they were driven away.

They spent the night at Rennes and took the early train to Paris where Miss Cass was once more installed at the Meurice.

The first few days were given over to a ceaseless activity of dressmakers and sightseeing. A round of the ateliers of the best craftsmen of Paris had assured them they were in need of many things which it would be ill advised to return to America without acquiring. It was one morning after a particularly long and tedious "trying-on" at an establishment in the Rue Cambon that, motoring up the Champs Elysées under the flowering chestnuts, Mrs. Cass asked her first question.

"How did Mr. Buel happen to be in Brittany at the same time as you?"

"I wondered why you didn't ask that before."

"I have been waiting to see if you would tell me of your own accord."

After Helena had finished her explanation Mrs. Cass felt that her daughter's avowal had not taken quite the form which she had intended. She looked at her mother with compassion and admiration. Mrs. Cass was far from a beautiful woman, but there was something restful in her being deliberately middle-aged. Her appearance was always dowdy, but a dowdiness which suggested means; her failure at smartness seeming more from intent than from want of skill. She wore no jewellery but the broad, unsightly band bought at a period when wedding rings were wide, and a pair of diamond earrings Mr. Cass had given her when they were married, which she slept in and never removed. One forgot her shortcomings after seeing the steadfastness of her eyes; eyes before which secrets ceased to be secrets.

"We are in harmony, you and I, mother. Why can't life always be as pleasant? It would be so much easier if father wouldn't deliberately misunderstand me, and censure everyone who is not exactly like himself."

"You know your father's peculiarities. The only thing for you to do is to attempt not to rouse them."

"Every time I came home I tried to iron myself flat before I entered the house. I prefer never to express an opinion. But you wouldn't have me cowed like Annis, would you? The only freedom that I can see in store for the two of us is to marry, quickly, and get away. But there is no one paying Annis any attention, is there?"

"No."

"Well, directly I am married I promise I shall take her in hand and see what I can do for her."

Miss Cass had spoken with greater temerity than she knew. Several seconds elapsed before she realised that she never expressed herself so definitely since her father had issued his edicts that Mr. Buel was not to enter his home again, and that Helena's ring was to be immediately returned.

Mrs. Cass's eyes travelled from her daughter's averted profile to her ungloved hands clasped in her lap where the diamond winked, every facet one of fire in the sunlight.

"Then you intend to marry Mr. Buel?" she asked at length.

"Why shouldn't I be frank with you, mother? You know I intend to. I've always intended to, even when I seemed to give up for peace sake when father was so rampageous with all that melodramatic fustian about 'not darkening his door.' If poor father only had a sense of humour he would realise that sort of thing is outdated, and not a little absurd. It would put an end to our intriguing. I'm not bad. I'm amenable to tact, but I won't be whipped. Why, I know enough even about horses to know that the animal who submits to a whipping is good for nothing. I suppose there's enough of father in me to rebel. I'm a blooded animal, not good old Dobbin to be driven between the shafts. . . . Mother, when we return, won't you try to urge father to reconsider his attitude toward Jordan? After all, he knows nothing against him, does he?"

"No."

"Then isn't his dislike childish?"

"Perhaps."

"I don't want to be married furtively in runaway style. I have a personal loathing of deceit and elopements and the usual procedure of ill-breeding. I want to go up to Lohengrin and come back to Mendelssohn in true orthodox manner. You will urge him, won't you?"

"I will if I can."

"Why do you say 'if you can?'"

"Because at present I share your father's dislike of Mr. Buel."

"You dislike Jordan?"

"I don't like him. What I blame your father for doing is opposing the match at the start. I think you cared very little for Mr. Buel until your father began his abuse of him. I believe if he had consented and urged the match you would never have become engaged."

"Do you think I am quite so perverse?"

Helena flushed but her mother continued imperturbably:

"I believe your first real attraction to the man began when he was berated. You felt that it was done behind his back and you undertook his defence yourself. The more detractors he had, the more ardent your defence. You soon felt you couldn't live without him. Do you feel that way now?"

"Yes."

Miss Cass remained silent a moment after this admission, then she said:

"On what do you base your opinion? Have you heard anything against him?"

"Not a thing. It is purely personal. I feel he is not a man to interest you after the first few months of love-making are over. He is the first man, so far as I know, to be very much in love with you. That in itself has its effect. When the time comes when you can allow him to take your hand without any perceivable rise of temperature, you will see him as I do. I want to spare you that. I don't prohibit your marrying him, Helena, I only ask you

to wait. I will urge your father to allow him to come to the house on our return if you will not announce your engagement until four months later. By that time you should know. Is that fair?"

"Yes."

"And in the meantime you will not see him or speak of him to me? You agree to that?"

"If you wish."

"And as soon as you cease to love him you will tell me?"

"Mother, I shall love Jordan as long as I live."

"No doubt. But as soon as you cease to, you will tell me?"

"Yes."

For some time following this conversation they remained silent.

The taxicab was returning down the Rue de Rivoli and drew up in front of the Meurice.

As Miss Cass made her way to the office for her key the clerk handed her a note and two cards. She took them with a feeling of intense curiosity as she recognised in a glance that it was the angular penmanship of the Marquise de Lanel, written on her tinted, scented, coroneted paper.

She tore open the note and read that dear, dear Nell must be *very* much surprised at her delay in writing to say how *much* she *regretted* not being at home when Nell left. She had hoped *Mrs. Cass* would pay her a short visit and *perhaps*, if their plans to return to America were not *too* definite, they would both come to her in the *Spring*. Château life was pleasanter at that time of the year and she expected a series of house parties which would be *incomplete* without *her*. She would have written *earlier* but she had been very occupied in connection with the charity ball, and speaking of that, she did not know *just* how angry she should be with Nell for *deserting* her before it had been pulled off. As it was *Comte André* had asked after her and Tristram remarked how *much* he had missed her. Anticipating her return and her *mother's* in the *Spring*, she sent much love to both, but *especially* Nell, from her ever fondly Edith.

Miss Cass read the note through twice in blank amazement. Had the woman taken leave of her senses? Her feeling at first was one of indignation at what appeared to be unbridled impertinence. Then she glanced at the cards which depicted views of the château and were inscribed with like messages, though with greater restraint, and signed: "Fondly, E. de L."

It was her first acquaintance with the childless, etheric type of woman whose sex became a burden to her in outliving her youth. She had not known it possible that women depending entirely upon their femaleness for their hold over husbands or lovers, became neuropathic, developed hallucinations, imagining every younger woman a solicitant for the love of their mates.

Two days later brought another and more explosive letter and after that the fusilade of endearments was recommenced with old-time vigour. Miss Cass threw these notes all into the scrap basket with contemptuous disregard and the single observation:

"That woman is a better subject for a series of sanatoria than house parties."

During the odd hours which extended between ceaseless shopping expeditions and futile trips to the dressmaker for shifted or cancelled "fittings" they did those things which two ladies alone in Paris were privileged to do. Thousands of Americans thronged the pavements, and one day on entering Rumpelmeyers at the tea hour they came upon Mrs. Slaterlee and her two young ladies. To Mrs. Cass's suggestion that they leave and seek the Ritz, Helena was not agreeable. Her mother had ordered pen and paper and was engaged in writing a note and Miss Cass had opened a newspaper to look up a theatre for the evening while waiting for their order. In this way their acquaintances were allowed to pass them without recognition so that Miss Cass never knew if she had been observed or not.

Sometimes when they took their coffee on the terrace of the de la Paix they sought cynical amusement in counting the faces which they recalled having seen at home on the

Avenue. They went to the more decorous theatres, and even dined at the Madrid and had supper at L'Abbeys. One warm hushed night when the scent of chestnuts and flash of fireflies in the Bois made the thought of bed a mockery they became a link in the procession of motors after the theatre. Each car held a man and his companion in evening dress, in search of some absurd or perverse gaiety. The flattering glow of the Avenues was like some artfully lighted drawing-room. Cigarette ends gleamed out of the darkness of each car like suspended fireflies.

They stopped at a restaurant where the tables were set up in the trees reached by a winding perpendicular staircase, each table lighted by a suppressed gleam which might have been produced by clusters of low-powered glow worms. At first the magic of the picture held Miss Cass; the tables at various levels, the lights, the chaff called from one to the other, frequently tasteless when accurately understood but in keeping, typical, congruent. And in the distance beyond the shrubberies the kaleidoscopic shifting of motor cars without once breaking the endless deploy. In the haze of the lake swans with prodigious gravity swam slowly across placid water, or attempted to make night out of the vague unreal splendour of this Paris day.

But as time passed she realised they were the only ladies alone and their inconvenable position made itself felt. Some of these people would go in the early morning to Pré-Catalan and see the cows milked, *filles galantes* and their companions, and be provided with glasses of warm milk. At such moments she recalled Jordan Buel's sense of fun, his willingness to enter into any sport, his strength and hardihood which made him an assured victor. If he had been in command that evening each minute would be charged with the exchange of furtive glances and all the intoxicating privileges of betrothal.

For there was no question of their not marrying. She realised each day as the loss of him made itself more keenly felt how spiritless, without savour, were the blanks which extended between the hours of rising and going to bed.

The tedium would have been relieved could she only recall his anecdotes, his foolish mockery, but his name was not to be spoken before her mother.

Paris under the circumstances revoked his image too distressfully to be pleasant to a girl in love, and without adequate substance to satisfy. At first she hoped that in the hazards of every day movement they might run across him, the days foreigners followed being all very much of the same motiveless plan. But at length that hope was renounced and the unreasoning need of getting away became vehement.

It was one morning when, their dressmaking completed, they were leaving Boué Sœurs on their way to Cook's to book their return passage for America, that Helena remarked:

"Must we go home directly? You need a vacation, mother. Isn't there some quiet place that *you* would like to go?"

And so it happened that they emerged into Rue de l'Opera with tickets to Madrid and had planned a brief trip in Spain, booked to sail four weeks later from Cadiz.

IX

MRS. CASS and her daughter were quartered at the de la Paz in the Puerta del Sol. All the carriages and motor cars of the city passed in a double file beneath their windows out the Calle de Alcala to the Prado, returning by the Carrera San Jeronimo. They soon acquired the habit of spending their evenings in driving to the Prado, there to alight and stroll along the gravelled walks under the plane and ilex trees, watching the leaping fountains that sought to cool the summer air and listening to the music out of doors.

This was an animated scene frequented by all walks of life. Ladies of Madrid in Paris hats, with only an occasional older woman wearing the native mantilla; peasants and work girls, their heads uncovered showing thick black hair, glossy as though powdered with diamond dust, a red rose or an immense fringed carnation worn above the forehead; young girls attempting to return the glances of students in spite of watchful duennas; nurses with infants in perambulators sleeping through all the hubbub; and slightly older children who raced between the legs of pedestrians and played at bull fighting among the myrtles. And accosting each person as they passed were beggars who asked for charity with all the nerve and decorum of diplomatists and the *caballero* accosted proved himself the equal of the beggar in courtesy by discharging the obligation.

At midnight the crowds remained undiminished, vivacious, orderly, without insult or drunkenness. And although pickpockets might ply their trade it was done suavely, with dignity. For Helena, feeling an alien hand in her pocket, grasped a man's wrist. He bowed, raised his hat with his free hand and remarked:

"My mistake, señorita."

And Miss Cass, embarrassed by her familiarity in holding his hand, instantly released it as her cheek flushed and she murmured:

"I'm so sorry."

Later Helena and her mother both laughed. No matter what their deed it would be impossible for these people to lose their urbanity; they were the best bred of the world, conscious of their reputation, and able to realise it. Here indeed was the perfect democracy of a proud race in which the *hidalgo* and the mendicant are treated alike, for to the lady the beggar is a *caballero* no less, and the *caballero* a man, no more.

The heat became intense and even flooding the streets three times a day failed to relieve an atmosphere that was like the breath of a furnace. Leaves fell in the plazas from a burning temperature more devastating than the cold of winter. At noontime laborers in soiled blouses lay on the pavements asleep in the attitudes of the dead, seeking any protection from a sky of metal. In the poorer quarters small boys played without orthodox garments and in front of fruit shops tenders kept vigil, a duster of paper streamers astir to discourage flies from the unsound fruit.

With the approach of evening streets that had been deserted sprang once more to life. The walking-sticks of blind men were heard tapping the stones, boys balancing trays heaped with apricots on their heads jostled the crowd. With the darkness appeared heavily scented women, their faces powdered as white as magnolia blossoms, indecisive step and lingering eyes linking them as generic sisters to the women of the Paris Boulevards. *Niños* cried evening papers above the rattle of wheels, policemen with sabres respectfully conducted sisters of mercy across impassable *paseos* and strangers were not free from the importunities of men urging the last chance for the transfer of a lottery ticket.

On the day of a *corrida* bands were to be heard tuning up in the morning and playing at intervals throughout the

day. At an early hour the Calle de Alcalá and its tributaries became congested with vehicles of every description drawn by horses, mules and asses, wedged in among worldly motor-cars sounding impatient horns. The Mayor and his family were seen to drive by in a barouche and peasants in native costume had been passing all morning carrying their lunches, on the way to the bull-ring to wait patiently for hours in the sun. Sober-looking matadores in costumes that dazzled the sunlight, each wearing the cape thrown over one shoulder and twisted about the waist, and the small round hat of tradition worn above the eyes, responded gravely to the delight of their admirers. When the *espada* of the hour was discovered driving among the press he was received with acclamation, waving handkerchiefs, cigarettes and flowers thrown from crowded balconies. Field glasses were for sale or hire, *sirups* and sherbets hawked outside and within the ring. . . .

It was on such a day that Mrs. Cass continued her persistent trips to the Museo del Prado since the gallery was cool and she was assured of being alone in the *sala* of Velasquez. After remaining some time, catalogue in hand, before the infant Don Carlo and Queen Isabel of Bourbon she turned to Helena for comment and discovered she had not noticed the pictures. She had observed her daughter's waning attention for several days. The extreme heat had made her pale and a lassitude had descended upon her that she appeared unable to rouse. Sometimes through an entire meal at the hotel she would not once open her lips to speak.

"You're tired?"

But Miss Cass scouted the idea. It wasn't fatigue, yet for some reason Velasquez did not hold her attention. Her mother proposed that they visit the house where he had lived which was on exhibition.

"I really don't care to see it. You look shocked. Don't protest. . . . I'll admit I'm in an ugly humour. Just don't talk to me for a little while, please. I'm going for a long walk. I'll be back before dinner and much better company."

"In this heat!" Mrs. Cass protested.

But Helena had gone.

One afternoon while Mrs. Cass was taking a siesta Helena started for a ramble on foot, passed the Royal Palace to the massive bridge which spans the Manzanares. In late August this had shrunk to a half dozen rivulets, that separated and rejoined across a sandy bar, but after winter rains would become a considerable stream. Here kneeling at work were all the laundresses of Madrid washing garments of every colour. While spread out to dry on the bank were lines of crimson, orange, vermillion, like some great horticulturist's experimental gardens.

Helena remained on the bridge watching the women at work, struck by the colours under the fiery sun as forming a picture. She suddenly noticed two Englishwomen seated beneath the shelter of a sun-umbrella who were sketching the scene.

The elder had risen and moved back for a better view of her work and in glancing up caught Miss Cass's eye upon her. She recognised her observer as English-speaking and nodded:

"Picturesque, isn't it?" she observed.

"Very. I envy you. I was wishing I had brought my materials."

"Do you sketch too?"

"A little."

"Then why don't you join us? You won't be in the way, and there are crayons enough for us all."

They were working in water colour and pastel and at their feet lay a tray of chalk of every hue. Helena seated herself in the dust without further ceremony, accepted the paper, clamped it to a drawing board and began to work feverishly in silence. Their own sketches were more than half finished and she was afraid they would be ready to leave shortly. All the futile restlessness of past days left her as she felt the crayons once more between her fingers. Never had she wanted to do anything so much as sketch at that moment.

When at length, the sketch finished, they asked to see it and she held it up for inspection, she realised that, in spite of haste, it was a creditable drawing. It could not equal the delicacy of theirs, but at least it was nothing she need be ashamed to show, since it possessed a certain verve coupled with a very accurate sense of colour.

"That's rather charming," the elder woman remarked. "I like it. Have you done much sketching here?"

"None."

"What a pity we didn't meet earlier. My sister and I have just been on a sketching trip in the Sierra Morena but we're returning home the first of the week. We found the most delightful spot. I'll tell you the name. You must go there. Every street of the village was 'paintable,' and such types! Madrid really isn't picturesque. It's getting very like Paris and Brussels. One has to go to out-of-the-way places for colour now, even in Spain."

While talking she had strapped up her camp stools, drawing box and umbrella and they now set out to return to town.

"Do tell me some more about this place," Helena pleaded. "You make me restless to leave."

"It's delightfully inaccessible. The express stops at the town of El Cerrito, which is the nearest point of communication. From there you take a diligence which leaves twice a week and it is a three-hour journey. The diligence is canvas covered, drawn by mules that have been carefully shorn so that their backs and flanks carry out an imaginative design and motto of their owner, which in the sunlight makes the animals look as though their hides had been covered with stamped velvet. The mules wear tasselled fly-nets and collars of bells. It's a very exhilarating drive to Fuente la Higüera. The village is situated high up in the mountains past shrines for penitents, and little wayside hamlets. There are herds of bearded goats, the herder with a rose behind his ear, marching along singing some wild Spanish refrain that is centuries old. Many of the inhabitants have never seen a train and none of them speak any English except

the proprietor of the *fonda*, and his is very limited. But his wife cooks a delicious *olla* and I'm very fond of Spanish cooking. You should taste her blood pudding and pimento omelet served with hearts of artichokes prepared in oil and surrounded with yellow rice. . . .

"We were there three days and were sorry we couldn't stay longer. It's such a pity that these places can't remain always the same. As an artist civilisation almost breaks my heart. The world is becoming more shrewd but less intelligent."

Here the younger woman remarked:

"Don't encourage my sister on that subject."

At the corner of the Calle de Alcala they bade each other good-bye and Miss Cass returned to the hotel.

Helena was surprised that the enthusiasm of a chance acquaintance should so have power to ignite her own. But she felt that a sketching tour was the one thing that would ease this irresolution of thought and inconsecutiveness of action. It was better that she recommenced work, and since she had enjoyed sketching that afternoon, wouldn't a week at the village of Fuente la Higuera bring her forgetfulness and quiet rebellious nerves?

She had always felt a peculiar contempt for the sentimental type of womanhood. And yet for days she had been the victim of moods, of intense depression, in which she had forced herself to long walks and drives because if she had remained in their suite she would have lain on the floor and kicked. She had a mental picture of herself in the process of thus quieting her over-stimulation. Was this love? . . . Where was her splendid control of the past, her sane outlook, her untiring fondness of exercise, her unwillingness to submit to tiresome conventions? At such moments she wished she had never seen Mr. Buel, and following the thought she felt penitent tears rising and she knew she wanted him as she never wanted anyone in her life. And yet she could not talk of him to her mother, and that in itself seemed to draw them apart.

But when the project of a trip was suggested Mrs. Cass

agreed with the single reservation that they consult the American Consul as to the safety of that region for two foreign ladies travelling alone.

"Of course it's safe, mater. Those two English women were there alone."

"Perhaps they were older than you."

"They were."

"And less attractive."

"Oh, hang my attractiveness. I'm hideous. I thought so this morning when looking in the glass."

"You're not happy."

"Yes, I am. I didn't mean anything. Really I didn't. And you mustn't mind what I say. I'm merely getting jumpy."

That afternoon Mrs. Cass consulted Mr. Tooker, and discovered that the American Consul knew very little about that quarter of the Sierra Morena mountains where they proposed going. He had held his official position many years and travelled frequently by train without incident, but more than that he could not say. He invited Mrs. Cass to call upon him if he could be of use to her at any future time. In view of this neutral response she decided to attempt the trip. Since it was only for a week they would carry hand-luggage and very little money, and then should Fuente la Higuera fail to live up to expectations they could continue to Cordoba.

This decision reached, Helena's face brightened and she threw her arms about her mother's neck.

"Mumsy, you are the dearest creature that ever lived. I wonder why I'm such a beast? I feel I have it in me to be a really nice person, I mean develop strength of character, and yet I don't."

"You're thoughtless, that's all, but I know you're going to overcome that."

And yet that evening when Mrs. Cass descended to a late dinner she saw Helena posting a letter, and as her eyes met her mother's her face flushed guiltily, then paled. Mrs. Cass knew without questioning that the letter was to Mr.

Buel and in spite of Helena's promise she had broken her word.

This discovery caused her actual anguish. Helena might commit many deeds through impulsiveness and high spirits, but that she would deliberately break her word was incomprehensible. It was part of her characteristic relationship with Helena that she never asked for confidences. She knew that no allusion on her part would bring an admission and she refrained from asking in the fear that her daughter might lie. For she knew from the expression in Helena's eyes whom she had written to, and the girl caught in deception assumed an increasing diffidence to cover her distress.

They left Madrid next morning wearing inconspicuous clothes, their apparel limited to the contents of a dressing bag, a handbag, a large portmanteau and a box containing colours, drawing materials and accessories. According to schedule they were due to reach the town of El Cerrito around six o'clock that evening. El Cerrito, though small, was the convergent point from which one set out to a series of villages separated from railroad connection. As most of these mountain fastnesses existed independently, and the inhabitants lived and died within the shadow of their birthplace, they had no need of sending or receiving anything by rail. Telephone and telegraph were alike unknown to them and the motor car was an invention of the devil still unheard of.

The train, interminably delayed, dragged them across an arid plain, through rocky gorges and over sluggish, yellow streams. At the various stoppages water carriers ran along the platforms crying: "*Agua fresca, agua fresca.*" Wine was sold out of wine skins whereby the liquid tasted strangely leathery.

In the mountain passes the darkness came suddenly, the sky turning a faint mauve above them and a star appeared through the evening flush. The landscape was lost in a gloom without dimensions and lessened only by an occa-

sional light. It was nine o'clock when the train drew into the platform at El Cerrito.

Mrs. Cass and Helena had no need of asking questions of the *Guardia Civil*, resplendent in tarnished uniform, who affably lounged in a doorway smoking a cigarette. Her acquaintance with the English women had supplied her with sufficient data, even to the day and hour of departure of the diligence for Fuente la Higuera. In a moment she recognised the man from the detail of accoutrements which had been described to her.

Some minutes later the *cochero* appeared, a big, dark-faced man, wearing a black sombrero, his legs incased in grass gaiters, carrying two bundles wrapped in bright-coloured cloth. Helena called out the single interrogation:

"Fuente la Higuera?"

And he replied:


"Si, si, se orita."

Then he clambered up to his seat, and they entered the diligence and were soon rattling down the narrow, roughly paved street, and were out in the darkness of the country road. They sat in silence for a time peering out into the enveloping blackness, but at length as their effort to identify in what direction they were going failed them, they ceased to pay attention. Mrs. Cass was not a timid woman. The fact that they were proceeding miles from civilisation over an ill-travelled road did not quicken apprehensions of danger. But her head ached, and she was fatigued after hours of discomfort from heat and dust in an uncleanly first-class carriage.

After they had continued many kilometres they sighted a light ahead, and the driver drew up, climbed over the wheel and leapt to the ground. He entered the low building, a *cantino* in use as a sort of halfway house. It was dark but for a light which came from a single window behind a grating. From within they could hear the thrum of a guitar and the sound of voices. Later a laugh rang out, more voices, then a long silence. The mules drew their

heads together, then lowered them to crop at the dry blades of grass in the roadway.

For a long time there was no sound from the *barraca*, then its door was flung wide and the *cochero* returned. From the light behind him they saw that his step was lurching and heavy. They realised he was quitting a wine-shop and that this last gratification of thirst had reduced him to senseless torpor. He climbed laboriously up to his seat and gripped the lines. He called abuse to the animals in words so vile that Helena failed to understand them, as once more he drove the mules jingling their bells at a brisk pace through the darkness.



X

THE arrival of Mrs. Cass and her daughter at Fuente la Higuera that night was more in the nature of a deliverance than anything else. The darkness that closed about them seemed a palpable substance, dry, unyielding, that all enveloped. The air was scented with wild growth and the pungent odour of country dust which the animals' tireless feet provoked. During the long ascent the mules walked, nor could the driver's opprobrium quicken their pace.

Reaching the crest of a hill, they saw the town before them and at its entrance the sweating animals stopped in their traces, from long habit. Miss Cass realised that their arrival without incident was due to the sure-footed mules. She alighted, carrying her luggage and handed the drunken *cochero* several pesetas above their fare, thinking, in this way, to obviate any possible argument. Then they proceeded on foot up the narrow flagged street, paved with round stones. The middle of each *calle* sloped toward a slight depression, used as a means of carrying off rain and even débris. The houses of Fuente la Higuera were all huddled together at odd angles as though for protection, each adhering to the next; many were built Moorish fashion without windows that gave toward the street. If the hill town was not prosperous it at least escaped distress, for its buildings were whitewashed and its doors and casements provided with heavy locks and grills. In fact had Fuente la Higuera been the home of the *bandoleros* it could not have been more securely bolted and shuttered against intrusion, instead of being as quiet a township as lies in the mountain district of Spain.

The Englishwomen had humourously prepared Helena a diagram of the *fonda*, and by the use of this they found the place. And it had proved a wise precaution, since the

cochero had been in no condition to direct them, and no one seemed abroad at that hour. Although midnight, they saw through the open doorway of an ill-lit wine-shop a group of men seated about a table playing cards, while above them hung a mist of cigarette smoke. They turned the corner, saw the sign of the *fonda*, and approaching it Helena gave a resounding knock on the door.

At length they were rewarded by hearing footsteps within. A thin line of light appeared above the worn door-sill and a voice called out in Spanish:

"What do you want?"

"A lodging for the night."

"Who are you?"

"Friends of the English ladies."

At that the door swung wide and they were bidden to enter. A tall, spare, sinuous man, with rolling black eyes, coffee-coloured face and the features of an Arab stood in the doorway. He spoke a harsh Spanish unfamiliar to Helena, but she understood him readily and concluded that although an Andaluz he had travelled some and so spoke Castilian as well as his native dialect. He wore a night-shirt, a pair of hastily assumed trousers, held by a worn red sash, and his small brown feet thrust into a pair of list slippers.

After the ladies were within he shut and bolted the door, set down his candle and lighted a cigarette. He was a person of portentous dignity and with a fluent, graceful gesture enquired if they had experienced a comfortable journey.

Miss Cass explained that a delayed train had occasioned their unseasonable arrival but hoped they would be accommodated. Her weeks in Madrid had proved sufficient to indoctrinate her with the need of excessive courtesy in addressing all classes of Spaniards.

"This miserable house is honoured," the clerk remarked with an inclination of his head. "I am happy to serve you."

He now moved to the back of the room which served as

an office. He opened the door to a cupboard, extracted an ink pot, the ink of which had almost entirely coagulated, and two slips of paper. These he removed from a visitors' book in which they were later to be inserted. He thrust the rusty nib of his pen into the ink and handed it to Miss Cass. He pointed with the nail of his little finger, sallow and conserved with care to a great length, indicating the paper on which she was expected to sign her name. She was amused at the absurdity of registering at this primitive *posada*, but she lifted her veil and removed her gloves for the operation. She wrote: "Miss Helena Cass, New York," then handed the pen to her mother, who wrote: "Mrs. J. de W. Cass, New York."

After a careful scrutiny of their names he remarked they were "English from New York" and Helena did not correct him, knowing that in the mind of the average Spaniard an "American" means a South American. In many of the smaller towns she knew the existence of America was unknown, the more ignorant of the peasants believing there was no country other than Spain. He now cast sand upon their signatures, then placed them between paper hinges and returned the book to the cupboard.

"My mother and I have not dined," Helena remarked. "We would like some supper—anything in fact that you have ready. Some bread and cheese would be enough and a little wine."

"This poor house contains but little," the clerk replied, "but what it has shall be laid before you."

With that he left them and made his way to the rear of the *fonda* with instructions for their supper. Exhausted, Mrs. Cass seated herself upon a rush-bottomed chair vis-à-vis to Helena with a table between them.

"You're very tired, mumsy, aren't you? But you're not sorry we came. The town is picturesque. And I think we're going to be reasonably comfortable, don't you?"

"I hope so."

At that moment she noticed the ring on her daughter's hand.

"Why will you wear jewellery when travelling?" she enquired.

Helena saw that her mother was tired, and knew that a number of untoward experiences that evening had each added elements contributory to her present feeling. She turned the stone on the inside and sat with her hands clasped in her lap. A few minutes later the clerk entered bearing their supper on a tray, a handful of steel knives and forks, and a coloured tablecloth held between his teeth. With an adroit whisk of the cloth it was on the table and savoury breaths rose from the hot fried *tortillas* of eggs, meat and potatoes, red wine from a skin, brown bread, delicious figs and thick coffee faintly spiced.

Their supper despatched, Mrs. Cass felt in better spirits and realised her fatigue and distaste in her surroundings had been largely occasioned by hunger. Helena found the wine bitter and scarcely touched it, the stem of the grape being used as well as the fruit in the brewing; but Mrs. Cass in the hope of coaxing sleep drained her half glass. Then the clerk took up the candle and led them above stairs. In exploring the upper story he halted before a row of doors in the passage on which numerals were crudely painted. He unlocked one marked "number five," opened it and thrust his candle in for their investigation.

The cubicle was furnished with a tester bed with curtains. Before the single window was a table covered with bright cotton to resemble a ladies' dressing-table with a mirror above it, beside which the room contained two rush-bottomed chairs and a smaller table bearing a copper jug and earthen basin for supplying the bath. The walls bore faded yellow paper of bouquets of fuchsia tied with ribbons and enlivened with flying and perching birds. Two pictures hung on either side of the bed, one of the King of Spain in his coronation robes and one of a *banderillero* seated silently watching a bull. The floor was of terra cotta tiles, and a small grass mat was placed at the bedside.

"This room is too small. I want one large enough for

my mother and myself." Helena objected. "Where is the one the English ladies occupied?"

The clerk clapped one hand to his forehead in an extravagant gesture, indicating profound regret, while he rolled his black, expressive eyes in facile ingratiating.

"I have a thousand regrets but that room is occupied. I have but one other room in the *posada* which is free."

They followed him as he continued along the passage bearing the candle past the bend, down two steps and threw open the door of "number eleven." This he was at pains to tell them was a "new" room, and, to believe him, none more comfortable for a lady in all Fuente la Higuera was to be found, he said, tapping his full chest in ratification.

Mrs. Cass opened the casement and looked out into the street. The wine-shop abutted the *fonda*, from whence they heard angry voices, followed by what seemed a fracas, but the clerk reassured them that the card game was always friendly. She realised that what she mistook for anger was the high-pitched voices of a Latin people speaking a foreign tongue interspersed with the strange gutturals of the dialect.

She glanced about her, saw there was a general cleanliness, felt of the bed, found the mattress was filled with straw and agreed hastily to occupy the room. The clerk vanished and reappeared shortly with their luggage; this was divided between them, each supplied with a candle and then Miss Cass and her mother kissed and parted for the night.

Mrs. Cass performed the necessary tasks before retiring, undressed and let down her hair before she realised that Helena's bag held most of her things. Covering herself with a dressing gown, she unlocked her door, made her way to "number five" and tapping, called:

"Helena, it is I."

Miss Cass opened the door and they both broke into laughter.

"Of course it's a hole, but it is adorably quaint. And I

think we are going to be very much amused, don't you?" Helena asked.

"I can tell you better in the morning," was her mother's only answer, as she selected her own articles which in precipitate packing had been jumbled.

Then they kissed once more and she returned to her own room, blew out her candle and got into bed. Twice when nearly asleep she was startled into sudden wakefulness by hearing someone passing in the street thrumming a guitar, followed by an uproar of barking dogs. Then sleep claimed her and when she awoke again the sun was streaming in her window.

She consulted her watch and found it was ten o'clock. She had slept so soundly that voices from the wine-shop below had in no way interfered. She rose, dressed and carrying her handbag proceeded down the passage to "number five." She knocked on Helena's door, but receiving no answer, was about to turn away, fancying she had breakfasted and begun an excursion of the town. Then stooping, she saw that the key was still in the lock on the inside of the door. She knocked again. Helena had evidently overslept herself, too. There was no answer. Hitting the door with her fist, she called sharply:

"Helena, Helena . . ."

There was a sound within of bare feet on the floor. The door was unlocked and wrenched open, and a strange man, dark of face, clad only in a pair of drawers and soiled shirt, which bared his chest, stood before her.

XI

HER first overmastering sensation was bewilderment. Who was this stranger? What was he doing in her daughter's room? Why was the door locked on the inside since Helena obviously was not there?

She and this half-clad man continued to exchange hostile glances. It was he who spoke first and, without understanding him, she judged he asked derisively in his own tongue:

"In what way can I be of service to you, señora?"

Mrs. Cass realised her half-dozen phrases were unequal to the occasion and so replied bluntly in English:

"I'm so sorry. I made a mistake in the room. Please excuse it."

He bowed slightly, permitting himself a highly-wrought smile. But she did not notice the even row of white exposed teeth. Her eyes at that moment had observed a nick in his forehead, a slight scar above an eyebrow as from a knife thrust. It had left a white indenture in his bronzed face, lifting one eyebrow that gave his expression a sinister quality.

This experience was just one more misadventure following last night's perilous drive, which decided her she could not leave Fuente la Higuera with too much dispatch for her own satisfaction. She was wondering how she had been so stupid as to make a mistake in the room when he closed the door. As he did so she noticed the crude "number five" painted on it. Then she had not been at error! That was Helena's room after all, and already the door was closed against her. At that moment she heard the key turn in the lock.

Mrs. Cass was seized by a condition of panic. She remained irresolute in the passage, feeling a growing irritation against the benumbing fear which choked the working

of her brain. She attempted to reassure herself that she had forgotten the number of Helena's room, but in this she was unsuccessful. She recalled it beyond chance of mistake.

Helena, she concluded, had risen early and gone out to sketch. And as the *posada* was full, this man had taken this opportunity to let himself into her room and steal a few hours' sleep during her absence. His eyes had shown that her knocking had wakened him, and he had blinked at her when he opened the door. She would explain at once to the proprietor and insist upon the man's removal. They were paying for the usage of their rooms both by day and by night.

With this intention Mrs. Cass descended the stairs and entered the room which served as office for the *fonda*. It was here that their supper had been served on the night before, but this morning it was deserted. As the *fonda* was not supplied with bells there was no means of summoning attendance. After a moment of restless pacing she opened the door which admitted to the *sala*, but this was dark and showed no sign of being used. There was a door at the rear of the room and she made her way to it, opening it cautiously. It connected with a kitchen, an ill-lit, smoke-filled room, provided with an open fireplace, where food was being cooked on a spit over a handful of coals.

In the centre of the room stood a strong, tough-fibred woman, the front of her dress covered by a soiled drugget she had tied about herself. She was crooning a dirge without change of tone and seemingly without end while engaged in removing the entrails from a chicken. One firm hand gripped the fowl, the other was plunged within it, blood staining her drugget and covering the table before her.

Suddenly her dirge ceased and feeling herself under observation she raised startled eyes. For a moment the two women continued to inspect each other, silent, motionless, across the dark kitchen. Strings of onions and garlic and bunches of herbs depended from the ceiling, and in the

warm air their essence was diffused, making the kitchen redolent of seasoning. The woman who seemed no longer interested in Mrs. Cass now removed a handful of blood-covered entrails and continued at her work.

"Where is the *posadero*?"

The woman shook her head as not understanding.

"Don't you understand any English?"

The woman hesitated, then shook her head once again. Her movements seemed disconnected from any mental workings, like those of an automaton.

At first Mrs. Cass felt that the woman was persistent in her failure to understand, until she attempted to ask her in Spanish where the night clerk was. The woman, thus lured to speech, replied glibly, mumbling her native dialect. She was evidently a Gallegan and neither spoke nor understood any Spanish, only the idiom of the locality.

Mrs. Cass then enacted a pantomime to ask if the *señorita* who arrived last night had breakfasted. But the woman continued her meaningless oscillations and Mrs. Cass, realising her efforts to arrive at any understanding were futile, left the kitchen to return to the office.

She knew her daughter's enthusiasms were mercurial. Helena had undoubtedly made an early start with her sketching materials, thinking to do some work before the morning grew too warm. With this thought in mind, she opened the door and ventured into the street.

She looked up and down the narrow sun-lit *calle*, with its strip of shade under the overhanging eaves. Asses were being driven by to market, women riding on them seated sideways. And about her was the mild commotion of a small town awake to the duties of the day. Reaching the end of the street, Mrs. Cass continued to the market-place where burros stood with half-filled panniers and housewives bargained. She passed small shops; a *cantino* where empty casks in use as stools were tilted against the wall and herds-men and *arrieros* lounged in the doorway. They were picturesque looking men, their heads bound with coloured handkerchiefs, pirate fashion, their faces weather burnt,

their eyes flashing. They laughed uproariously and then ceased of a sudden as she passed them, recognising a foreigner who was still subject to unusual attention. There was something in the directness of their glance and minuteness of their scrutiny which chilled her.

In front of the church she hesitated and then decided to continue her search within. A blear-eyed old crone who sat on the doorstep knitting pulled aside the heavy leather curtain, and Mrs. Cass entered a vault-like building. The church was overlarge for the size of the community and all its wealth seemed to be centred there. The effigy of the virgin on the altar was robed in velvet with hoop skirts and slashed bodice, a nimbus behind her head, pearls on her bosom and preposterous jewels on her hands. The Holy Child wore a loin-cloth of rare Spanish lace, and a petticoat of the same was artfully seen from under the virgin's dress. Ruby lights burned at the altar, but in spite of the warmth outside the church was cold, musty and untenanted, and after a brief glance Mrs. Cass emerged and made her way back to the *fonda*.

The office was still unoccupied and there was no evidence of Helena having been there. Mrs. Cass had never felt more helpless or dependent upon her quick-witted daughter than at that moment. She proceeded once more to the kitchen and opened the door. The woman was still at work but this time Mrs. Cass decided to forego all preambles. (The only way to disabuse herself of mounting fears was to investigate room "number five," and since the clerk and proprietor were not there this ignorant woman would serve as well as anyone else. She beckoned to her, but the woman remained inert, watching her with a stupidity which seemed too well conceived to be anything but pretense.) Mrs. Cass then crossed the kitchen, and taking hold of the woman's arm firmly led her back to the office and upstairs, not halting until she reached the upper hall. Here indicating the door on which "number five" had been painted she made a pretense of knocking.

The woman hesitated only a moment and then rapped

heavily on the door. She received no immediate reply and after a brief wait repeated it. They remained expectant, waiting. . . . Then growing impatient the woman struck the door with all the strength of her knuckles. This time she succeeded in being heard. The impact of bare feet on the floor, a moment's pause, then a careful hand on the lock and the key was turned. The door opened and Mrs. Cass faced the same man. He was still attired as before. His dark, malevolent eyes beneath his scarred brow watched her, resenting her second intrusion.

Without knowing why she felt suddenly afraid. Of course it was not possible that Helena was in the room. And yet she wished to make certain. Not relaxing her hold on the woman beside her she pushed past the stranger until they were inside his door.

At this he mumbled several words which dropped out the corner of his mouth as though by themselves. The kitchen maid replied in his own tongue and after that they remained silent, nor did Mrs. Cass speak. She was at once so amazed and completely bewildered by the room she had entered that there were no words to clothe her excitement.

In spite of the reassuring number on the door, this was not Helena's room. She remembered every detail of the night before when she had been seated on the edge of Helena's bed, selecting articles from her daughter's bag. The walls of this room were white like her own. In a corner was placed a pallet bed, above which a silver Christ was nailed to an ebony cross on the wall. This was decorated with a bit of dried palm and olive. In front of the window was an old upholstered chair, now disgorging some of its stuffing, and across a corner a wardrobe, the door of which hung listlessly open, showing it filled with a miscellany of man's apparel. A single picture was on the wall and a closer scrutiny disclosed it as a crudely proportioned oleograph of "Suzanne at Her Bath." About the room was scattered a disorderly litter proving a protracted tenancy, and behind the door an ornate mule's bridle hung upon a peg.

Asking his pardon as best she could, Mrs. Cass withdrew. And yet the moment the door was closed she felt she wished to give it closer inspection. She gave up all thought of talking to the static kitchen maid beside her. There was nothing gained by addressing questions to complete inanition.

She indicated the door of room number four and instructed that the woman knock. She opened the door and Mrs. Cass upon entering saw that it was unoccupied. But this again in no way resembled the room which the night clerk had shown them. Thinking she might have been confused as to its position, since it could not have been "number five," Mrs. Cass insisted that every door be opened. She continued her inspection until she had seen each room on the second floor. But none had yellow walls figured with birds and fuchsias. Nor did any room contain a tester bed with curtains, or any of the furniture which she remembered.

And yet it was absurd to imagine that the room had not existed precisely as she recalled it. She remembered even the pictures of the King of Spain in his coronation robes and a *torero* seated intrepidly facing a bull, a banderillo in each hand; the dressing table which held a red pox-marked cushion; rush-bottomed chairs; curtains at the window. And above all the colour of the pompous fuchsias on the wall, the blue ribbons that tied them, and the green love-birds that hovered above.

What had first been a feeling of uneasiness now became a matter of terror. Where was Helena? Although she knew in her heart her daughter was not in the house she could not allow herself to think so until a systematic search had been made. The clerk had said at the time of their arrival that the *posada* was full. But investigation proved that the only rooms which were occupied were her own and that of the stranger with the scar on his brow. The fact of having trapped the clerk in that falsehood only increased her apprehensions.

But her search had not lain bare a single evidence of her

daughter's occupancy. She told herself she might have forgotten the room, seen only by candlelight, but Helena's dressing bag was not discovered nor her brushes nor any article of hers. The big drawing-box in which she had packed so many more materials than she would ever use was missing. Even though she had left expeditiously for a morning's work she would not hamper herself with useless impedimenta. But there was not a single reminder. Not a veil, nor a handkerchief, nor a hairpin.

Mrs. Cass felt suddenly faint. All generation of thought had become clogged by horror. They had arrived last night without premonition of disaster, and all at once, without warning, Helena had vanished. She tried to brace herself against the shock that such fancies were the result of faintness. She had not breakfasted. And then remembering the long dreamless sleep of the night before, it occurred to her the wine might have been drugged. After that the thought of both food and drink alike became abhorrent.

Was it possible that this whitewalled room, with its curtainless window, after dark was transformed and clothed with yellow walls covered with bouquets of fuchsias tied with ribbons and ornamented with flying and perching birds? She knew the ignorant peasant believed in people metamorphosed into animals and birds, and houses being spirited away and returned. After all there was nothing in the beliefs of the supernatural too incredible to satisfy the mind of the Spanish countrymen with the superstitions of the Moors as a background to present plausibility. Then she wondered if she were losing her mind to allow her thoughts to stray to such abstractions. She forced herself to choke them off. She must recall the moment in hand, and what lay before her.

She was standing at the head of the stairs gripping the hand rail. There was one more thing left to do and that was a search of the lower floor. She had thought the room was "number five," but it had been proved conclusively that she was in error. She had thought the room had been on the same floor as her own, but possibly this had

been a mistake too. Even while she encouraged this fiction she led the kitchen maid down the stairs and began a thorough search through the rooms adjoining the office. But this search proved in no way enlightening until she came to one door which the Spanish woman declined to open.

"Why can't you open this?" Mrs. Cass called out excitedly, speaking in English.

Her few words of Spanish had now deserted her utterly. Under stress she spoke frequently even though she knew she was unintelligible to the woman. The kitchen maid's reply was a mere jangle of sound. It meant nothing to her. As the woman refused to knock, Mrs. Cass hammered on the door. Then discovering it was unlocked she tore it open.

The room was occupied. There was a bed opposite the door, and a man struggled up angrily, enraged by the interruption, and then seeing the intruder, his expression changed. She recognised the man as the clerk of the night before. She was conscious of a repulsion as suave, urbane, he inclined his head in recognition of her as though forcing herself into his room were a most natural procedure.

"You speak English?" Mrs. Cass cried.

"A leetle."

"What is your name?"

"Pedro, señora."

"You admitted us when we arrived last night. My daughter and myself. You assigned room number five to my daughter, didn't you?"

Don Pedro, as he was in the habit of being addressed, opened his fine black eyes with dismay.

"Room number five," he said, now speaking in Spanish, and in her excitement language seemed to matter little, for Mrs. Cass understood him. "Oh, no, señora. That is impossible. Don Rodolfo has lived in that room for many weeks. This gentleman has been my guest since the middle of July. He has honoured my miserable house that long."

"Then what room did you assign to my daughter?"

"Señora, I do not know this daughter of whom you speak."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say, honoured señora."

"Have you forgotten that you saw my daughter last night, ordered supper for two, and afterwards carried her bags upstairs with mine and gave us two separate rooms, because you said the *fonda* was crowded?"

"A thousand regrets, but I do not recall it. When you arrived here last night I admitted you, that I remember well, but you came alone."

XII

HIS words, uttered with that complete courtesy which was his natural speech, chilled her. With perfect calm, his eyes on hers, he told her he had never seen her daughter.

Mrs. Cass rallied after a moment of speechlessness. There was something in the facility and directness of the man's lying which stunned her. His motives were impenetrable, and there seemed now a terrible malignancy in his ease of manner and pliancy of his smile.

"I would like to see you in the office a moment, Don Pedro."

"It shall be as the señora wishes," he replied.

He rose and slipped incredibly small arched feet into his slippers. She returned to the office and a moment later he followed her, appearing in the adjusted costume of the evening before, a nightshirt and a pair of trousers bound by a faded red *faja*, a hastily rolled cigarette hung moistened to his lower lip.

From the moment in which the man lied she found herself unable to think connectedly. That Don Pedro was a rascal was not altogether a surprise. But that the man should be a criminal as well was past belief. And yet he declared without any of the embarrassment of dissimulation that she had arrived alone. He had seen no daughter. The statement was so amazing that she was unable to think of any motive strong enough to supply impulse for his lie.

Mrs. Cass had only one proof of Helena's arrival last night with which to convict him. And now that he had followed her into the office she asked to see the visitors' book in which they had both signed upon their arrival. She felt craftily that she had snared him here. Keeping close to his side so that he could not remove a page from the book without her seeing him, she crossed to the desk. He went

behind it, opened a cupboard, removed the book and handed it to her. She turned to the last page. Inserted between hinges of paper was the card which had been given her last night. Beneath the date she read the superscription in her own hand:

"Mrs. J. de W. Cass, New York."

That was all that the page contained. He had remembered to destroy the card on which Helena had written her own.

She turned excitedly to the kitchen maid.

"*You* remember very well that you prepared supper for two last night, don't you?"

The woman looked at her blankly.

"She not understand English," Don Pedro reminded her.

And then as Mrs. Cass's fear and despair seemed complete, he turned to the woman and began to speak to her earnestly in their native idiom. The woman listened in what appeared amazement, showing the whites of her eyes and shook her head several times in denial. Then Don Pedro turned to his guest, resuming in English:

"I translate your question. She not see this lady and she say supper was just for one. The señora is very tired. If she would lie down she would be m-much, much better."

She felt the sudden helplessness of the ponderous Anglo-Saxon mind before the strange, inscrutable workings of a different race. This man seemed less Spaniard than Arab. The cut of feature was that of Africa, the bold, appraising eyes, the controlled yet passionate lips. His mouth was like a pomegranate that had been cut in two, the lining blood-red, the teeth perfect, even and strong as those of some ferocious animal of the jungle. The man's habits and customs were inscrutable to her, the processes of his mind impossible for her to understand or circumvent.

His graceful, nerveless hand, which lay along the top of the desk was as small as a woman's, a pale brown, perfectly formed. The fingers were like tapers, and the nails well cared for, and she noticed again that on the little finger being grotesquely long. As she looked at his hands the

long, narrow nails seemed to her all at once the claws of a carnivorous animal. She was conscious of a scent which clung to him, potent, masculine, but not unpleasant. He was watching her, his fine eyes glowing. He expelled smoke through his nostrils, and then opened his lips as though about to speak, showing the soft, red lining of his mouth. She had tried in the last seconds to inoculate herself against fear of the man, but fear, like a poison, had spread through her.

Suddenly, without a word of explanation, Mrs. Cass turned, opened the door and vanished into the street. It was impossible for her to continue to argue with him. The woman being in his service was already bought and so was of no use. Or, if not, she at least could not understand, and the questions he translated were so distorted as not to be of assistance to her. And the woman had not seen Helena. She realised suddenly that they had arrived so late the night before that she had seen no one in the streets whereby she could substantiate her claim.

Leaving the *fonda*, she was moving without objective, her one idea being to find a guardia civil and return with him and place Don Pedro under arrest. But she had continued some distance without sighting any member of the law. Then it occurred to her that the *alcalde* of the *barrio* was invested with greater power, and she would do better to explain to him what had taken place.

She stopped men in the street to enquire where the *alcalde* lived, and was almost in despair in not making her request understood. At length she received directions which were clear to her and made her way to his house. She knocked vigorously on the door. There followed a moment of maddening deliberation; the door was opened by a middle-aged man, with grey hair, whom she concluded was the *alcalde* himself.

Her pent-up excitement broke in a torrent of incoherence. English sprinkled with Spanish. The *alcalde*, seeing the stranger was labouring under great stress, led her within amidst expostulation for calm and reason. The

room they entered was comfortless but she did not notice her surroundings as he drew a chair out from the wall and with a courtesy she now recognised as part of every Spaniard, begged her to be seated. He offered her a glass of wine, and though faint, she refused it, remembering the fiery *aguardiente* she had tasted on the night before and its results.

Even after she had told him her story as best she could he continued to look at her in doubt. She explained that she and her daughter had arrived the night before from El Cerrito. The train had been delayed and they had reached Fuente la Higuera at midnight, had gone to the *posada*, had supper and been shown to two small rooms, and then parted for the night. In the morning she had been unable to find her daughter and upon enquiring of the clerk, he said that no one had arrived with her. This was amazing enough, but the *alcalde* wished to know if Helena had not left a note in her room before leaving, since it was patent to him that she had run away. Here Mrs. Cass had to confess the most irrational point of her story. She had not only been unable to find her daughter that morning, but no more could she discover her daughter's room. It had vanished during the night. And at present there was no room at the *posada* which bore any resemblance to it.

At this the man shook his head and eyed his visitor with a sort of kindly compassion. Mrs. Cass, beginning to despair of making him believe her, now broke into tears. Her very evident distress moved him and he called, "Pilar, Pilar," to a serving woman who lurked in the darkened passage. A middle-aged woman entered, supplying the *alcalde* with his hat and stick, and he set out to accompany her back to her lodging.

Fortunately she possessed an accurate sense of direction and remembered in spite of the similarity of the narrow streets the way she had come. Reaching the *fonda* she found the door closed and anticipated that Don Pedro had bolted it against her. She knew instinctively he had gone at once to her room, destroyed what possessions she had

left and would further repudiate all knowledge of her. She was, therefore, surprised when the door yielded easily to her hand. The office was deserted but the kitchen-maid was at work and went in search of Don Pedro, who had gone to the wine-shop around the corner.

When the woman returned with him a moment later, his equipment for the day was the same as when Mrs. Cass had last seen him except that he had supplemented a coat to cover his nightshirt. He was in no way surprised by the advent of the Alcalde and greeted him as a friend in his most casual manner. Don Pedro, it seemed, was not the night clerk of the Posada as Mrs. Cass had supposed, but the owner, and Maria de la Concepción was not the kitchen-maid but his wife, who acted as cook and took care of their guests. Don Pedro had travelled quite extensively in Spain and engaged in other trades before taking the *fonda*, but María de la Concepcion was a mountaineer's daughter and had never been but a few miles from Fuente la Higuera.

"The señora did not believe my word. She want another prove I no liar," he said with his deferential smile, which now seemed to have lost some of its application.

And Mrs. Cass, feeling there was nothing disputable in the assertion, agreed. The alcalde explained that he had not been able to understand the Señora Inglesa and asked for Don Pedro's version of what had transpired. This he told with his habitual flow of words and ease of narration. The lady had arrived last night, partaken of supper and gone to her room.

"Just a moment," the alcalde interrupted. "The lady you say was travelling alone?"

"Yes."

"Why should a lady come to this town, three hours distance from El Cerrito, alone? Has she friends here?"

"None."

"Then what brought her here?"

"The reason for that, my friend, I will explain later. The lady is undoubtedly eccentric. This morning she comes

downstairs and asks my Maria for her daughter. My good wife and I are naturally amazed. There is no daughter. The lady came alone."

"I shall not be satisfied, Don Pedro, until I have gone over your house."

"Willingly, my friend. That was what I should suggest."

The alcalde then enquired of Mrs. Cass if she remembered the number of her daughter's room, and she said, without hesitating, that she believed it was number five. At this Don Pedro took a ring of pass keys from the cupboard behind the desk, they mounted above stairs, Don Pedro turned the key in the lock and instructed them to enter the room in question.

Don Rodolfo, interrupted in his midday sleep, sat up in bed, flung back a thatch of thick, black hair which fell over his eyes, and looked at the group that stood before his bed. He seemed insensitive to the publicity of their proceedings and only annoyed at being awakened.

The alcalde enquired if Don Rodolfo had occupied his bed that night. He was answered in the affirmative.

"How long have you lived in this house?"

"Since the middle of July."

"And you have been in possession of this room all of that time?"

"The same."

He then turned to Mrs. Cass, asking if she recognised this room as her daughter's.

She had, during their conversation, examined it minutely and realised it resembled Helena's only in the fact that the floor was tiled, like all others, and that it possessed but one window. She attempted to describe the colour of the walls, the bouquets of fuchsia and the birds ornamenting it. Don Pedro reaffirmed that he never had any such room, had never seen such paper, and unlocked other doors to support his denial. There were pink walls, and grey walls bespattered with pink roses, and whitewashed walls, but none that bore out her description. At length he unlocked and opened the door to Mrs. Cass's own room and she saw

her bag and her few possessions exactly where she had left them.

There remained little use in continuing the search. Don Pedro's story was direct and seemed without duplicity. Don Rodolfo was known to have remained at the posada some time and it seemed not unlikely that the room was his, as he claimed. Mrs. Cass's explanation that her daughter was an artist and had journeyed thither to sketch appeared doubtful since there was no evidence of materials. And Fuente la Higuera was indeed a curious place for ladies to travel by themselves.

As Don Pedro had been successful in obstructing all investigations, their efforts led to nothing. Mrs. Cass requested that the alcalde accompany her to shops while she purchased a few necessities. This he courteously agreed to do when he learned that she was afraid to eat anything prepared by Maria de la Concepción. Her story that Don Pedro had been struck by Helena's beauty and the exotic appeal of a foreign type now assumed less colour, since it was discovered that he possessed a wife.

She bought brown bread, goat's milk, figs and Murviedo cheese and seated herself upon the church steps to eat her meal. Her head was racked with pain from hunger and exhaustion and her nerves clamorous. She knew that in spite of Don Pedro's proof, satisfactory as it was and all encompassing, that the kindly man at her side was in reality a friend. She knew that he believed, in spite of distortion, that her story held a seed of truth and they would yet arrive at the facts, no matter how cleverly they were overlaid with falsehood. He continued to ask her questions in Spanish which harassed her without being able to reply. Exhaustion had dulled her faculties, so that she was no longer capable of making shrewd guesses as to what was meant.

For some time they shared the church steps in silence. She had finished her luncheon and yet was too tired to recommence her search. But her anxiety increased every moment. She was caught in a net of non-comprehension from which it seemed impossible for her to extricate her-

self. The fact that two women of means should arrive at Fuente la Higuera without other purpose than to allow Helena to sketch was incomprehensible to her guide. To him women of the upper classes were without liberty, and when they travelled it was under the care of a man's escort and for a more definite aim.

Mrs. Cass had despaired of making herself clear to the alcalde when a fresh means of disentanglement occurred to her. For the first time she remembered the *cochero* in whose diligence they had been so recklessly driven on the night before. The man was probably in the town. It was imperative that they find him. He could not fail to recall Helena and he would remember that she had paid him several pesetas beyond his charge. His word would be sufficient to give the lie to all of Don Pedro's denials. And with him on her side it would be a simple matter to engage the service of the guardia civile, who would soon arrive at the truth.

Mrs. Cass had been in despair. Suddenly she felt buoyant with hope. All that was necessary was for her to have her story believed. Then with the slightest evidence of the truth Don Pedro could be terrorised. Under penalty of commitment he would be forced to admit his crime.

Before she allowed herself to think further she rose impatiently from the church steps. She explained her plan to the alcalde as best she could. At first he was expostulatory and full of questions which she did not understand. But at length, as her intentions became more lucid, the kindly man agreed with enthusiasm. He knew the *venta* where the *cochero* could be found at that hour. He would lead the señora to him at once and they would arrive at conclusions shortly.

They set out toward the outskirts of the town where they drew up before a stone built hut. The alcalde went within, returning with the *cochero* who had driven them on the night before. He seemed sleepy and came out blinking from the darkened, windowless interior, the room lighted only by the open door; the floor was made of beaten clay.

In the brilliant sunlight he looked as though he had been interrupted at his siesta. But Mrs. Cass saw that the man was sober and her spirits rose.

"Angel," the alcalde said, "you drove this señora last night from El Cerrito. You recall that?"

"Si, señor."

"The señora generously gave you several pesetas above her fare?"

The man looked at Mrs. Cass with increased interest.

"Now what I want to know is, did you have any other passenger in the diligence, or did the señora make the trip alone?"

"She came alone," he said abruptly.

"One minute, Angel. Are you certain? Was she not accompanied by a beautiful señorita? Inglesa? A young lady with brown hair, and fair skin, wearing a blue dress and hat, a veil, gloves, and carrying, this lady says, a walking stick?"

The cochero looked at them stupidly and made no answer.

"Come, my man. You know if this lady was a passenger. Why don't you speak?"

The man hesitated and then remarked:

"You see, *amigo*, it was like this. I had tasted wine at El Cerrito and at the halfway house where I often change mules. In short, I was very drunk. I remember there was a lady who paid me well. What she looked like that I have forgotten. I remember only one. If it is this lady or another I cannot say."

Mrs. Cass knew by the man's expression that she had failed. The inebriate muleteer spoke the truth, but he was of no use to them. Nor could any efforts to prompt a failing memory prove of any assistance. To all the alcalde's questions he made the same reply. He did not remember.

They left him and he threw himself down in the narrow strip of shade before the building. They returned to the fonda, Mrs. Cass disconsolate, her guide deeply puzzled. They were greeted by Don Pedro, who inquired of the

Spaniard if they had seen anyone who remembered having had a glimpse of the daughter that the señora lamented. To this question the alcalde shook his head.

"No. We have seen the cochero but he does not recall the young lady."

Don Pedro made a strange grimace; speaking rapidly in Spanish, he said:

"Is it not as I assured you? *Vaya!* The señora is not only eccentric, she is worse."

He tapped his head, giving a significant gesture as he looked at Mrs. Cass. And the older man shook his head in pained accent.

"The lady is not right. She may have had some grief. Who knows? At all events there is no daughter, you may rest assured to that. I doubt if there ever was one. On many subjects the lady is sane, but on that one she is——" And he tapped his head once more and lowered one lid over his eye. "You believe me?"

And the alcalde nodded gravely. He had just arrived at the same conclusion.

Mrs. Cass, who had remained standing in the doorway, had not been party to this colloquy. But she knew without words that she had lost an ally in the alcalde. The muleteer's failure to recall her daughter had convinced him that she, like her luggage and her vanished room, were all a part of some partial delirium. And without his assistance she knew she was powerless to find Helena. No one in the town would believe in her existence.

Having won the alcalde to his own point of view, Don Pedro had now offered that worthy a glass of aguardiente and they removed to the neighbouring venta. As they passed Mrs. Cass they saluted her, Don Pedro with a gesture of what seemed exaggerated respect. She thought once to intercept the alcalde and attempt to convince him of her sincerity and then realised it was futile. He was already lost to her cause. To him her anxiety was dementia and would no longer be given an ear. She was desperate now. Her hopes at the lowest rung. There remained but one

man who could render her assistance. All at once she had thought of Mr. Tooker, the American Consul in Madrid, who had instructed her to call upon him if he could be of any service.

She sought out Angel, the *cochero*, once more, whom she had found lying face downward on the paving stones before the *venta*, where he had thrown himself, while flies hovered and crossed in the air above him. As she made her terms with him she removed silver from her bag to conclude her bargain. He sat watching her as she talked, a fly on his cheek encircling an inflamed eye, drawing closer and closer to it, but the man apparently had not a nerve and remained unconscious, allowing it almost to enter his eye. At length she offered him a sum in excess of what he would make were the diligence full and he consented to harness his mules at once.

It was five o'clock when the diligence drew up at the entrance of the town. Any uneasiness which she had experienced on the initial trip was now forgotten in stronger anxieties which were all for Helena. The rocking of the diligence over the rough road and the velocity with which the whipped mules descended the inclines eased the feeling of greater desperation within her. At best they were moving, and she had taken her first step which was to eventuate in her daughter's freedom.

Mrs. Cass reached El Cerrito that evening at nightfall. The diligence was not scheduled to repeat the trip for three days. But she realised her only hope lay in communicating with Mr. Tooker at once. Much as she dreaded leaving Helena alone in Fuente la Higuera she knew she could be of more service in summoning immediate assistance. Alone she was unable to resort to any strategy which would bear results, and El Cerrito was the nearest point from which she could wire the American Consul.

At eight o'clock they were at El Cerrito. She was carrying a small handbag and her money was sewed into her bodice for greater precaution. She paid Angel and dismissed him in front of the hotel and then went within and

engaged a room for the night without asking to see it. She inquired at the office if there was a telegraph bureau near at hand and set out to find it.

The entire drive from Fuente la Higuera had been spent in the composition of a telegram which would be sufficiently forceful to insure Mr. Tooker's immediate answer to her summons. For each period of renewed courage had followed a recoil of terror in which she realised her plight if Mr. Tooker was unable to lend assistance. She knew how many chances there were that he had official business on hand which could not be set aside. And then he might be out of town, or in ill health, or have forgotten, or merely be bored by the prospect of an hysterical woman. After all, no one had less claim upon his attention than had she.

Reaching the telegraph bureau she removed a slip of paper from her bag on which she had written out her message and copied it on a telegraph form. She wrote:

"Señor don Samuel Tooker, American Consulate, Calle de Serrano, Madrid. My daughter has disappeared from Fuente la Higuera and I know has been kidnapped. All efforts to apprehend her have been unavailing. At the inn they even claim that I came alone and have no daughter. I am desperate with anxiety and helpless as I cannot make myself understood. Please come to me at once. Every hour increases her danger, as of course she is imprisoned. Wire immediately what you are willing to do. In desperate need. Fredericka Cass."

She read the wire over several times before committing it to the operator. Had she made her case strong enough? Could any words exemplify her straits with greater clearness? She wondered. She consulted the exposed dial of the clock across the plaza. It was now nearly two o'clock.

She rose, handed the strip of paper to the operator, paid for it, then returned to the hotel and partook of dinner. Food caused her distress, but she forced herself to eat, knowing she would have need of all her strength on the morrow. Dinner despatched, she quitted the hotel for a stroll, realising that sleep was impossible and she could not

discipline herself to an evening alone in her room waiting for time to pass.

She walked to the extremity of the town through narrow streets without pavements, people pouring out of every darkened doorway to greet the cooler air after the heat of a long day under a sky of brass. A herd of goats were driven from door to door, stopping patiently to be milked in order to provide each baby with its daily apportionment. The goats obeyed the reed-whistle of the herdsman, halting always where a woman was waiting with an empty cup. As the odors of the streets became less pleasant and Mrs. Cass collided with ruffianly-looking people without occasion she realised she was in the poorer part of the town and returned to her hotel, ordered coffee sent to her room and mounted the stairs.

She removed her hat and seated herself by the window. When the coffee arrived she aroused herself to lighting a lamp, and with the tray before her poured out a cup of black fluid. Her nerves had deserted her utterly. There was no drug strong enough to induce sleep that night and each nerve cried out for the stimulant of coffee. They were like living creatures in torture, begging for a caressing hand to soothe them into quiescence. She rose and threw herself dressed upon the bed and lay there looking at the ceiling. The ceiling seemed grey except for a wavering circle of light made by the lamp.

At nine o'clock the next morning she went below-stairs but no wire had arrived for her from Madrid. From then on she dreaded the passage of every quarter of an hour. She was afraid to leave the hotel for fear that the wire might come during her absence and there be some technicality whereby it could not be signed for by another. At ten o'clock she went to the bureau but no message had yet come over the wire for her. She returned to the hotel and paced her room, since she could not remain downstairs where her anxiety would be under observation, it being one of the exactions of the Anglo-Saxon mind that it be allowed to suffer alone.

At midday there came a tap on her door. She had so many times fancied she heard someone climbing the stairs to her room and been mistaken, that she did not answer it at once. The tapping was repeated before she opened the door. An old man stood in the passage and extended an envelope toward her. As she saw that it was a telegram she was seized by uncontrollable trembling. She grasped it and sat down on the side of her bed, as her limbs no longer had the strength to uphold her.

"Am leaving Madrid first train. Due at El Cerrito at 3 P.M."

For a moment she felt she had not read the telegram correctly. Then as she realised he was really coming her devitalised constitution seemed to re-absorb strength from the bit of blue paper in her hands. She saw, all at once, that the old man had not gone but was still in the passage. She fumbled in her bag, found five pesetas and handed them to him. The man looked at her as though he thought she had taken leave of her senses.

"*Ave Maria!*" he cried, on noticing the amount. Then afraid she made a mistake and would correct it, he muttered hastily:

"*Vaya usted con Dios,*" and was gone.

Mrs. Cass uncrumpled the telegram and read it for a fourth time.

BOOK III

XIII

THE performance seemed interminable to Jay Sefton. Now that the golden curtains came together after the last recall of the second act of "Manon" he asked Mrs. Slaterlee's indulgence and went without to smoke a cigarette. In the foyer he was met by persistent friends who urged his accompanying them to the club rooms of the Metropolitan organisation but he resisted. It meant seeing more acquaintances and listening to more banalities and he wished to be alone.

Mr. Sefton went into the outer lobby and strode up and down in the cold, smoking. It was an evening in late November, the second week of the present opera season. The opening performances had crowded the house with the fashion of New York, the musical habitués and the hordes who wished to be thought fashionable or musical or both. It was one of those average audiences, Mr. Sefton mused, whose ebullition always overflowed in kindly appreciation while the artists were singing; that snuffed out every high note with ill-timed applause, and this evening demanded repeated recalls from the prima donna, presumably because she was singing slightly off pitch.

He smiled in a cynical mood, recalling a more tasteful performance of "Manon" heard at the Comique. Des Grieux in the smaller house, had been perfectly embodied by Clement, and the French spirit had been retained by not having the rôles sung by Italians. His criticism of the occasion was all of a piece, the result of a captious humour. Each day was resolving itself into a rapid routine which he seemed to lack strength to lighten.

Sefton's change of quarters still remained unproductive. In the two months since he had removed to East 80th Street he had seen Mr. Cass several times from his study windows, Mrs. Cass occasionally, and Roscoe and Annis almost daily, yet they had not perceptibly increased his store of impressions. With Mrs. Slaterlee's information he had been able to proceed further than most in the work of hypothesis, but he did not doubt that the detectives had outstripped him. Was this after all to be the end of his quest, he asked himself irritably.

He had waited for the first night of French opera with anticipation, remembering Mrs. Slaterlee's expressed preference, and had written asking her to accompany him. Their conversation had remained quasi-musical and literary all evening and he had expressed himself without knowing precisely what he had said, hoping in each phrase to mention Miss Cass incidentally. Mrs. Slaterlee as a woman of literary tastes had responded to his attentions through a regard for "Unexposed." So if he were to shift the basis of his civility to a means of learning more of Helena Cass it might result in her displeasure. It was fear of this which kept him from mentioning her name.

Realising that the evening was not likely to be fruitful he threw down the end of his cigarette in a receptacle and made his way back into the heated auditorium while a red light glowed in the foyer as warning of the next act. It was characteristic, he thought, as he walked down the aisle to his stall in the darkened house, that all men should be a little late to their seats so that their neighbours might share a maximum of discomfort.

It was after eleven when, the opera over, he guided Mrs. Slaterlee toward the 39th Street entrance, where a motor-cab was expected to wait for them. As they approached the entrance he saw two people before him who suddenly galvanised his waning spirits into life. They were too close to call Mrs. Slaterlee's attention to them except by touching her arm. She looked for a moment to make positive their identity before she exclaimed:

"Mrs. Cass, I don't know if you remember me."

The woman addressed focused her eyes upon the speaker meditatively and then said without surprise or emphasis:

"You are Mrs. Slaterlee."

"How kind of you to remember. I have wanted to come and see you while in town."

Sefton looked from Mrs. Cass in a black evening dress and furs to her husband, who still wore a mourning band encircling the sleeve of his Newmarket coat. To be sure it seemed more an object of decoration than a symbol of grief. But Mrs. Cass's face was drawn; this was no doubt that the lines were the result of worry and disappointment, and after three years they were still in mourning, so why should he suppose there was any use of continuing this search?

Once he was seated beside Mrs. Slaterlee in the cab, and they were being driven through a thin veil of rain, he asked when she intended to put her projected visit into effect. And as she remained indefinite he urged the following day. Couldn't she stretch a point and make it to-morrow and couldn't he accompany her? . . .

Something in his manner told Mrs. Slaterlee this extraordinary request came from the heart. With a partial understanding of the obsession by which he was ridden she agreed. When he bade her good night at her door it was understood he was to call for her at four next day.

Accordingly, prompt to the minute he presented himself, and a quarter of an hour later they drew up in 80th Street and he rang the bell. He could not deny the existence of an all embracing perturbation. He felt very youthful in this excitement. A parlour-maid opened the door and Mrs. Slaterlee inquired if she might see Mrs. Cass. The maid for a moment seemed in doubt how to answer. He suspected that visitors were unusual. But since she was obviously not a beggar nor was he an insurance clerk and they were calling at an orthodox hour, she led them across the wide hall and they mounted shallow stairs in her wake to the drawing-room floor. She opened long glass doors

and bade them enter while she disappeared with Mrs. Slaterlee's card.

At first they conversed in low tones with the audible suppression of persons who have arrived too early at a funeral. But after a moment realising that Mr. Sefton's mind was elsewhere she ceased to talk at all, allowing him time to absorb the surroundings in which Miss Cass had so often sat.

The drawing-room of No. 33 was not unlike what his fancy had pictured. It was expensive, smug, uninteresting. He seated himself on a saddlebag-chair before a wood-fire that remained perpetually unlighted. The room was well illuminated, inconspicuous in decoration with Georgian furniture, preserved with slight inaccuracies. Consol and occasional tables upheld empty vases amid a litter of silver and enamel trifles. The house had been furnished once and for all time, durably, inexorably and unimaginatively. The green bronze of Canova's Venus de Medici had been permitted to block the view from the drawing-room windows for twenty years.

Presently Mrs. Cass entered. She was dressed in black, which seemed to have eased itself from prohibitory mourning to something which might or might not be significant. Its severity had not sought relief in jewels. There was a uniformity in her manner of courteous reserve as she greeted Mrs. Slaterlee and suffered Mr. Sefton to be presented to her. He knew in that moment there would be no opportunity to mention her daughter.

Their chatting, labouriously manufactured at first, became later more spontaneous. There was no doubting the ladies' *aplomb*, but Sefton after a few comments experienced a feeling of dealing with shadows. Mrs. Cass herself seemed unsubstantial, a reflection in a glass—something one could not touch without shattering. Her expression became fixed.

She thanked Mrs. Slaterlee for her kindness in calling. That lady apologised for not coming before, and as though that remark sounded a warning note, Mrs. Cass agreed she

must be kept very busy at Vassar. Here there was a pause which she filled by observing that since her visitor was a critic of literature and her friend a novelist they must have much in common. From literature to opera was an easy step and then began a mild discussion of the performance of the night before. She questioned if the Metropolitan's well-known aversion to French opera was their chief reason for producing it negligibly. Did they think to kill the enthusiasm of its followers by half-hearted performances? While this point was debated tea appeared.

Later hearing someone ascending the stairs Mrs. Cass listened to a familiar step, then called:

"Annis dear?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Come in, please, a moment."

Miss Annis Cass came between the open doors, leaning against the lintel. Her unlikeness to her sister seemed her nearest approach to a personality of her own. As she stood before him Jay Sefton recognised the colourlessness about her with which nature sometimes shields a shy person, whereby one remains equally unconscious of their presence or absence from a room. She accepted a chair beside the tea-table, filling in the interstices between their observations with an unvarying smile.

Sefton's attention returned to Mrs. Cass, to her firm lips and keen eyes and hands that spoke mutely of strength and aptitude. He had been conscious ever since she entered the room that her indomitable eyes held a secret. It seemed apparent, too, in the determined carriage of her shoulders, the right held unconsciously a little higher than the left. He felt assured that although Mr. Cass might be master of everything that was inconsequent, Mrs. Cass triumphed without his knowledge in all the essentials. From her was to be found the answer to the riddle. Behind her dry calm manner was the certainty whether Helena Cass was alive or dead. In fact so strong was this conviction that upon it alone, without other evidence, he planned his next step. Later when leaving the house he had decided to book passage to sail the following week.

XIV

A HEAVY December sky, grey, forbidding, stretched taut to the horizon. It was now noon, two hours before the Sud Express was due in Madrid. Sefton, who was making the trip for the first time, had remained by the window of his *luxo* not a little dismayed to find since changing trains at Irun, on crossing the frontier, that Spain had a bleaker and less inviting aspect in winter than he had supposed. His knowledge of its topography was for the most part limited to the impressions of Gautier, de Musset and Louys.

Without they proceeded across sterile land, wrinkled, that looked like the skin of some mammoth creature, scared, stillborn, centuries old. Nowhere was there any sign of vegetation or cattle, nothing to arrest the eye or break the distance. Wagon ruts ran by the side of the tracks and then disappeared, seemingly without destination, the ground frozen, hollows holding crusts of snow. Once or twice they proceeded by low mud-coloured hamlets that seemed so much a part of the plain that except for an occasional wreath of smoke unmoved by the cold air they might have passed unnoticed.

The train continued over the desolation of the sand-swept *campaña*, like the entrails of some intense volcanic commotion. Here the earth had cracked and broken apart in fissures resembling the haggard features of a corpse recently exhumed to the outer air. Depressions filled with rain-water were covered by a thin layer of ice that looked as though a film had formed over dead eyes.

This immensity of devastation was girt by the snow-clad Sierra Guadarama which bound them in and chilled the air. At length he saw Madrid lying in the centre of the plateau like a toy city that seemed gradually to be drawn toward

them as though attached to a string, whilst the painted panorama beyond remained motionless. A few minutes later they had reached the platform of the North Station and he made his way through the vivacious throng to the street. He sprang into a cab and was driven past the Royal Palace by the Calle del Arenal, the Puerta del Sol and the Calle de San Jeronimo to the Ritz. Here he registered and was shown to a room overlooking the Prado and the fountain of Neptune. The water was now inactive and the sea horses were adorned with jewels of ice.

Without waiting to remove his overcoat he telephoned directly to American Consul Samuel Tooker. During the interminable delay his heart beat in his throat and a half dozen likely excuses claimed his ear. The consul was dead; or had retired from Consular service; or was so ill he could not be disturbed by a stranger; or again unwilling to give information to a person neither detective nor relative of Miss Cass and so without claim to the facts. This latter thought seemed the more likely to checkmate and he was wondering how he could refute any such argument when a soft Spanish voice asked who wished to speak to His Excellency.

"An American who has just arrived and is in need of advice," he replied.

A moment later there came a series of vocatives addressed in English that sounded like a pin drawn across a mirror. There was no doubting the national timbre of this voice with the flatted a's and accentuated r's suggesting a youth passed in Pennsylvania which twenty years' residence in Spain had been powerless to correct.

Sefton explained as concisely as possible his mission. He had come to Madrid for the purpose of obtaining replies to certain questions which were of the utmost importance and inquired the earliest hour that he could see the Consul. After a pause, Mr. Tooker named that evening at ten.

It was now a few minutes before three. He had seven hours to be got through with somehow. He had no interest to see the sights of Madrid, but to remain in his room

was manifestly impossible. Grabbing up his hat he rang for the lift, and disregarding any such effeminacy as an umbrella, he turned up his collar and made his way to the Prado, where a cold dismal rain was falling.

He allowed himself to be carried along by the throng, until some time later, finding himself in the Calle de Seville passing the Gran Cafe Ingles, he retraced his steps and entered. Most of the tables were occupied by enthusiasts of the *corrida*. The last one, it appeared, was a poor affair, since Sefton learned that no bull fight of any circumstance is scheduled in Madrid during the winter months. A waiter recognising a foreigner discovered a place for him next to a table where two well-known *matadors* were seated. He ordered black coffee and permitted his attention to settle upon his neighbours. Clear-eyed, olive skinned, their thick black hair shone smooth as satin above low brows. Both were wearing the *coleta* which he had never seen before. Diamonds flashed from their muscular hands; every line of their upright bodies denoted strength and agility. What a strange craft which took hold of the imagination even of the disbelievers. He found his interest kindled by the admiration surrounding them. An attentive waiter whispered their names with pride; both great men from Andaluz. His nearer neighbour abstemiously declined wine to sip a glass of *agua y azucarsillo*. The heat of the vast *sala* was intense and the interest of the vociferous crowd culminative.

Later he yielded his place to another and once more rejoined the drifting concourse. There seemed something unstable and purposeless in this press of umbrellas. He felt that the passersby were not really bent upon business but intent, gesticulating, they were moving nowhere, much like the throng of a cinema, who, vanishing off the edge of a screen, turn about only to repass once more. These people were a part of the general *mise-en-scene* of some vast adroitly-managed stage. They were now giving a daily evidence of vitality to streets and squares which were only adeptly painted perspectives of canvas and scaffold

which could be rolled up and trundled away in half an hour.

At six-thirty he returned to his hotel, tubbed, changed and dined quite alone in the empty restaurant. He discovered that no one dined in Madrid before nine, which doubtless accounted for Mr. Tooker's naming a later hour for their convocation. Dinner despatched, he bought a four-page Spanish paper and, returning to his room, threw himself upon a sofa and lay reading the local news.

At nine-thirty he started upon his errand, reaching the Calle de Serrano a few minutes before the time set. He was admitted by a man-servant, who led him to the Consul's study. Sefton introduced himself to a grey-haired man, who looked curiously foreign, and was waived to a chair. He realised his name was unsuggestive to Mr. Tooker, who apologised for not keeping abreast of American literature.

He offered his visitor cigarettes with execrations at the quality of Spanish tobacco, and then withdrawing them rang and instructed the servant to pass the gentleman the Havana cigars. Mr. Sefton was surprised to hear his host had not learnt to speak harmoniously the language of the people against whom his anathemas were directed. Consul Tooker after years in Spain still retained the belief that if one had anything of consequence to be said it was best spoken in English.

The next moment was given over to an exchange of lights, following which Sefton said abruptly:

"I have come to see you in regard to Helena Cass."

"Oh, Lord."

Mr. Tooker's ejaculation gave curt expression to his point of view. Had his visitor come looking for buried treasure he could have been no more indisposed to believe in the outcome.

"I thought that question ended long ago."

"Ended?—in what way? It will never be ended to me until I find her."

As Mr. Tooker's play of feature became more perplexed Sefton at length amended:

"Or at least have positive proof she is dead. Mr. Tooker, what do you think happened to her?"

The Consul raised his shoulders in the significant Continental gesture.

"Quien sabe?"

"But of 'course you must have some idea. What was your own explanation?"

"I don't know that I ever had one—that is, a satisfactory one."

After they had both been refreshed with chocolate and *churros* Sefton was able to urge him to begin his story. He spoke with the deliberation of one to whom thinking was an ordeal infrequently indulged in. Sunk in a backwater of petty consular duties he had gradually surrendered ambition, imagination and enterprise in a routine without scope, acquiring most of the frailties of the native Madrileño. Withal he was a pleasant companion, kindly, hospitable and intent to be of any assistance that he could.

In the study, ornamented with shabby Moorish decorations and worn red damask, the two men remained seated over the fire in the chimney. Twice the clock chimed the hour, but neither noticed it. The coals in the grate glowed, turned grey, shifted and fell through the grill in a silence tense, electric, while Sefton waited for the next word.

XV

THE arrival and departure of the train were two of the events of the day at El Cerrito and greetings were exchanged between trainmen, guards and the inhabitants. Mrs. Cass was on the platform before the train was due and waited in the blistering heat until its dust-choked arrival at five o'clock. She experienced a moment's doubt if she would recognise Mr. Tooker at once, as she had seen him only in the one instance when she had inquired on the safety of travelling in the Sierra Morena. But her misgivings were instantly routed. She stood facing the first-class carriages and he was the first person whom she saw alight.

He came forward, lifted his hat and clasped her hand in a manner of sympathy as at some bereavement. Seeing him bear his head as one bestowing condolence tugged at her self-control. In the first moment of greeting she did not know what he said or her replies. They decided to repair to the hotel for tea and then return by diligence to Fuente la Higuera.

Once at the hotel, tea was served them upon an iron table on a diminutive balcony under an awning. The sun dropping behind the mountains had burnished the roofs of the neighbouring houses with orange and brilliant pink, the windows themselves glowing like copper. Below, in the street, was a blind guitar player, led by a *chico*, and several gleeful children, unconscious of audience, had begun solemnly to dance the *jota* with no little suppleness and skill.

Mr. Tooker turned his back to the animated scene and asked Mrs. Cass to tell him just what had happened from the moment of her arrival in Fuente la Higuera until the disappearance of her daughter. Realising the importance that she tell an impartial story, unaffected by her own

surmisings, she recounted what had happened with as little embellishment as possible. When she reached the point in her narrative when she explained that in examining room "number five" she saw it was not that occupied by her daughter, Mr. Tooker's eyes seemed to renew their hold upon her.

"What room did your daughter occupy?" he asked.

"I was never able to find it."

"Just what do you mean?"

"Precisely what I've said."

"Surely you did not leave Fuente la Higuera without giving the posada a thorough investigation?"

"No."

"And even so you could not find the room which you described?"

Mrs. Cass shook her head. She had allowed her tea to grow cold before her.

"No. I saw every room. They opened every door for me, but Helena's room is not there. I know it sounds unbelievable, but it's the truth."

"How do you account for it? Your host isn't a magician."

"I don't account for it. Please don't look so incredulous. I am speaking the truth. I know it cannot be explained through supernatural agencies. Don Pedro is a dangerous and unscrupulous man and I believe is capable of anything. He is shrewder and better educated than the average villager. It is no ignorant person that we have to deal with."

"Evidently not. I know these things are so because you tell me, but——"

"There isn't any 'but'—they are so."

"Very well. I believe you. The explanation will probably prove a very simple one when we get hold of it."

"I hope so."

"You think Don Pedro kidnapped your daughter?"

"Yes."

"Then you know of a motive?"

"No. I thought at first that he might have been attracted to her. I am told the dark Spaniard admires the fair type of foreign women. Helena isn't fair, but she has the light skin that one sees rarely here, but it seems the man is married, so that may not be his reason. I thought too it might be robbery, but in that case he would have done so much better to come to me. I was carrying the money, and I drank enough of the drugged aguardiente so there was no danger of my waking. And the locks at the fonda are so insecure they could be easily picked."

"You are certain the wine was drugged?"

"Positive. Don't try to minimise what I have told you, Mr. Tooker. I am not naturally an excitable woman, so you can accept my word as no more over-coloured than a man's. I feel that your presence is going to frighten Don Pedro. It's one thing to have a woman to deal with and quite another to have a man. We ought to arrive at facts to-night which will show us just where we are. You won't have any more tea?"

"No, thanks."

"Then let us go."

The sun had already disappeared, and a faint bloom which would shortly produce a sinister darkness was enfolding the country beyond the town. Mr. Tooker gave his bag to a boy to carry and, excusing himself for a moment on reaching the diligence, strode across the plaza to the telegraph bureau where he saw to sending a couple of wires and then returned. Angel lashed his mules and they were off.

It was close to nine o'clock when they reached Fuente la Higuera and made their way to the fonda. Don Pedro was not at home but Maria de la Concepcione admitted them. Mrs. Cass looked at the woman's locked immobile countenance. It neither expressed surprise nor dismay at her return, nor any curiosity in her escort's presence. She realised that here was a woman, hardened by long apprenticeship out of doors, with a strength greater than her husband's, a constitution that knew neither nerves nor fatigue. Hers was the hardness of bronze with a com-

plexion coloured by long exposure that had the beauty of a statue only partially animated, a beauty proof against scars of burning sun or inroads of utter exhaustion. She was far removed from women of Mrs. Cass's world who had "days" for looking well and "days" for looking ill.

Maria de la Concepcione's stolid face betrayed no lapses into curiosity when Mr. Tooker addressed her in her native tongue. In her husband's absence she instructed him to register on a strip of paper which she afterwards placed in the book below Mrs. Cass's name. Later she led him upstairs and opened the door to "number four," and after a hasty glance within, he agreed to accept it. In the meantime Mrs. Cass had unlocked her door and found her room undisturbed. When she returned to the office a supper was prepared for them, and Mr. Tooker urged her to eat.

"Your wine may have been drugged before," he agreed, "but you may rest assured that they won't attempt anything of the sort again."

Mrs. Cass compromised on a frugal meal, but Mr. Tooker ate heartily. Later he picked up his hat and went in search of Don Pedro at the friendly *venta* around the corner. As Mr. Tooker reached the doorway he saw the room was lighted by a single petroleum lamp hung from the ceiling. Beneath it, in the harsh light and deep shadows, were seated half a dozen men visible through clouds of cigarette smoke engrossed in a game of cards which seemed to be made up of equal parts vociferation and death-like silence. It was during one of the momentary pauses that Mr. Tooker appeared before them.

"Gentlemen," he said, "is there one among you known as Don Pedro from the fonda?"

"*Si, señor. Perfectamente.* I am that gentleman you seek."

A man had risen, dark of face, possessing a curious, passionate calm that seemed Arabic in its intenseness, the quiet of boiling water that has cooled. His manner was free of shifting or evasion, and he returned Mr. Tooker's scrutiny without surprise or annoyance.

"I am the American Consul from Madrid, Don Pedro, whom Mrs. Cass, the English lady of your fonda, has asked to speak to you about her daughter. May I intrude upon your time for a few minutes?"

"Willingly."

As he lay down his cards Mr. Tooker recognised in his partner the evil face and scarred brow that Mrs. Cass had described as the present occupant of room number five. He felt, instinctively, in spite of past doubts that she had not overstated her case.

- As Don Pedro stepped out into the night air he enquired: "You arrived to-night?"

"Yes."

"Pray consider the fonda your house so long as it pleases you to remain in Fuente la Higuera. It is the daughter of the English lady you wish to speak of?"

"Yes."

"That *pobrecilla*!"

And he shook his head in desperation as he lifted the latch and led his companion into the office. He offered Mr. Tooker a pouch of tobacco which he declined, in order to smoke one of his own cigars while Don Pedro rolled and moistened a succession of cigarettes, one stub rapidly supplementing another hanging limply to his under lip. Don Pedro did not wait to be questioned. He already possessed a story, apt, eloquent, and a readiness of words which assured the consul it would be difficult to entrap the man. He told of Mrs. Cass's midnight arrival, friendless, utterly a stranger, without comprehension of the language, her supper being served her and she accorded a room. Next morning she insisted upon seeing room number five, occupied by Don Rodolfo, which she claimed belonged to this same mythical daughter. She described, he said, the furnishings of a room such as he had never possessed. A bed with a canopy, if you please. Not that he would not be proud to own any such luxury, but he, Pedro, and his wife, Concha, were simple, unpretentious people and their beds, the consul would be shown, were simply pallet beds, some-

thing to provide a modest shakedown for the night, no more. She had spoken of walls covered with flowers and birds, which he knew was not irony. No, it could not be irony. The señora was too patrician for such expressions. He had been unable to pay for extravagances and had been satisfied to have something more modest. But the consul should see for himself.

With a willingness intended to deceive, he led Mr. Tooker from room to room until every square foot of the fonda had been investigated. Don Pedro's words had proven only too true. The room Mrs. Cass recalled did not exist. Certainly it was not "number five." It was equally certain that it was not any other room. Don Pedro did not ask that the American believe his word but offered further evidence of his good faith by lighting a candle lantern and leading him into the *patio*. Here, by the well, he could hear two asses moving in their stalls, munching hay, and smell the not unpleasant odours of animals, grain and bleaching straw. Here Don Pedro was at pains to explain that the fonda contained no wasted space, so that it was obvious it possessed no walled or secret door. He convinced the stranger they had explored every possible receptacle under the roof, where, as he explained it, "that so-called daughter" could have hidden herself.

Mr. Tooker was not unimpressed. Don Pedro was, it seemed to him, undoubtedly, a rascal. But he was also a shrewd and convincing man. There was no point of Mrs. Cass's story which he was not able to overcome with proof and pointed comment, all uttered with his unfailing unction. At length Mr. Tooker's own receptivity reaching its limit, he said good night and, upon Don Pedro's "God be with you," climbed the stairs alone. His host, singing a verse of an old Spanish song, left the fonda in good spirits and returned undaunted to his game.

Next morning Mr. Tooker avoided Mrs. Cass and sought the alcalde. He remained with him an hour reviewing every incident of Miss Cass's mysterious disappearance. He heard the native man's own scepticism, who believed the

Señora Cass had been unaccompanied. Of the simple countryman's probity he had no doubt. At all events, this man was no way in league with Don Pedro. Directed by the alcalde, he later interrogated the cochero.

Angel now having had time to reconsider the events of past days, thoroughly deplored his inebriety, an excess less venial in Spain than elsewhere. Now completely chastened, he assured Mr. Tooker that while at times during the drive his mules had seemed double in number, he was now certain, that although most objects had been multiplied, the occupant of the diligence had consisted of only one lady.

Mr. Tooker explored Fuente la Higuera before returning to the fonda and there found Mrs. Cass awaiting his return. She had lunched alone, distrustful until she saw him again, for already Mr. Tooker seemed a very dear friend.

"Have you been able to trace any clue?"

"No," he said bluntly.

And then they avoided each other's eyes as he lowered himself heavily into the chair beside her.

"You've seen the room I spoke of is not here, haven't you?"

"Yes. I have seen that."

"Well—you must have some theory. Let me have it."

Mr. Tooker's eyes strayed to the animated street which they glimpsed through the open door, and at length returned to his companion. Mrs. Cass felt he would welcome any distraction which would render speech impossible.

"Mrs. Cass," he said at length, "I feel I am totally incapable to cope with this situation. The very premise of your case is one that evades my grasp. There is nothing I can lay hands upon. If you had called upon me to assist you to find a daughter who had been stolen I think I might have been of use. But this is a very different matter from what I anticipated. Mystery enters this. I'm . . . incredulous. You see I can't restore a lost room. I'm a very unimaginative man and unable to deal with anything but concrete cases. I only believe in what I see. I'm a materialist. I admit it. What I don't see doesn't concern me.

Highly strung people no doubt see a great deal that is invisible to me. But don't you realise already that you have sent for the wrong man?"

Mrs. Cass's face expressed terror.

"For God's sake, don't take it this way. There isn't any right or wrong man. I sent for you because I know no other American in Spain, and I am helpless except for what you can do for me."

"If you wish me to place it in the hands of detectives on my return to Madrid, of course I will do just as I am instructed."

"Don't leave me. Your judgment hasn't been affected by what these Spaniards have told you, has it?"

"No."

"Then what is it?"

"It's what you have said yourself."

"You think I'm mad. That I ought to be put away somewhere. Mr. Tooker, can't you see from my appearance that I am practical, that I am what is usually called a 'sensible' woman? You feel instinctively that I am not given to absurd vagaries or extravagant impressions, don't you?"

"Yes," he admitted slowly. "That's why I cannot make your appearance agree with your story."

"I am not surprised that the alcalde found Don Pedro's words more convincing than mine. We could scarcely understand each other. We had no common language. Moreover, I represented a type unknown to his world. But you and I are different. You know in your heart, as unbelievable as all this sounds, that it is true."

She paused a moment, her hands at her breast in a simple yet grandiloquent gesture of utter loss. So might Niobe have remained. Mr. Tooker was moved in spite of himself.

"I'm not a vain woman," she went on, keeping her voice to a natural pitch as best she could, "but I looked in my glass when putting on my hat to come down to meet you, and I saw my reflection for the first time to-day. I was shocked. I didn't recognise my own face. My appearance doesn't

matter. I only wish to say no woman looks as I do unless she is suffering acutely. You know that."

He inclined his head.

"Isn't it manifestly impossible that any woman should be in such torment over an imaginary matter? People don't suffer as I do even in madness. I suppose you think I am mad."

"I didn't say that."

"You implied it. And your silence convicts you. Mr. Tooker, no sane woman would come here alone for nothing. Now I left Madrid with Helena. We arrived at El Cerrito together at nine o'clock. I can't prove to you that my daughter was with me after that because Angel was intoxicated and has forgotten. Don Pedro and Maria have their own reasons for lying, and he has misrepresented matters to the alcalde so he naturally believes them. That is the strength of my opposition. Don Pedro's reason for lying is only too patent, but why should you believe him. You've seen Helena. You know she is a beautiful girl. She is probably one of the first American girls that this man has ever seen. It's not so difficult to understand that he wanted her and has stolen her and is keeping her captive. She was wearing, the night we arrived, the same dress as when she went with me to see you. Dark blue, with a hat to match, a veil, a string of pearls, but they were under her blouse and not visible. The pearls had little value, about five thousand; she had had them several years, and she was wearing a valuable diamond, but had turned the stone on the inside of her hand so it did not show. She had very little money with her, not over a hundred dollars. If it had been theft and not the girl he had wanted he would have stolen my pocketbook instead, wouldn't he?"

Mr. Tooker remained silent.

"Of course I am a mother and prejudiced," she went on, "but didn't you think Helena was beautiful?"

Again he was silent.

"Why don't you answer?"

"Because I've never seen your daughter, Mrs. Cass."

"Have you forgotten . . . in Madrid?"

"No. I remember your coming to the consulate, and you spoke of Miss Cass. You had a good deal to say about her, but you were unaccompanied."

"You are sure?"

"Quite."

"I had forgotten. Seems to me she did remain at the hotel that afternoon, now you speak of it, but that in no way alters the facts, does it? You know she exists, don't you? You believe I have a daughter, don't you? At least you believe that?"

"Mrs. Cass, I am not a Spaniard. I can't say the pleasant, easy things they do. I'm an American and am very blunt. If you have a daughter who is lost, I don't believe she is stolen. Furthermore, I don't believe Don Pedro or his wife are in any way concerned with her disappearance."

"Then how could it have happened?"

"In some perfectly simple, disingenuous way. I think you probably know Miss Cass very slightly. I don't doubt that the girl has met someone, perhaps a Spaniard, with whom she was flirting without your knowing anything about it. What has worried you with thoughts of kidnapping and ransom, I believe, is merely an elopement. Every mother thinks she knows her daughter, but how many do? Was your daughter often out of your sight?"

"Yes."

"Isn't it possible she received letters without your knowing?"

"It's possible . . . but I doubt it."

"Did you ever catch her surreptitiously posting a letter? . . . Think well. I can see by your face that you have. . . . Think it over and tell me if I haven't hit upon a more likely explanation."

XVI

Mrs. CASS would not allow herself to answer his query for several seconds. His supposition was improbable, but she admitted it had its points of resemblance with the facts.

At length she said:

"If Helena has eloped, as you say, how do you account for Don Pedro's lying? Do you think she paid him to say he knew nothing about her?"

"Perhaps."

"And this complete repudiation is simply the natural excess of one not versed in lying discreetly?"

"At least it's worth thinking about. If Don Pedro had stolen your daughter as ruthlessly and criminally as you suppose, do you think he could appear as unconcerned as he seems to be?"

Mrs. Cass covered her face with her hands and gave way, and then abruptly pulled herself up at the consul's next question.

"Do you know anyone in Europe interested in your daughter?"

"Helena considers herself secretly engaged."

"She does?"

"Yes."

"This sounds more like it."

She told him of Mr. Jordan Buel's infatuation for her daughter and of her conversation with Helena in Paris. She and Helena had come to Spain alone and, so far as she knew, the girl was not in communication with Mr. Buel. Mrs. Cass regretted to make the admission but she knew Helena had broken her word and sent him a note the night before they left Madrid. Her daughter fancied herself very much in love with the man, but she doubted the

attachment being serious, and disapproved of the match as strongly as her husband.

"Now we have something to work on," he remarked cheerfully as Mrs. Cass finished. She felt herself impregnated with a certain optimism which these disclosures seemed to have established in his mind. She reassured herself that Mr. Tooker was a person of greater experience than she and his substitution of motive for Helena's disappearance was not unlikely a better working basis than hers, with which to set out to overtake her.

"It now resolves itself into a case of 'find the man,'" the American Consul continued. "Wherever Mr. Buel is, there is your daughter. Have you his last address?"

Mrs. Cass admitted that she knew nothing of his whereabouts. She had not seen or heard of him since Helena had left Brittany. At that time he had been stopping at St. Lo, but merely to be near Miss Cass. He had undoubtedly left directly Helena was gone and was not unlikely in Paris, or at St. Aix.

Mr. Tooker's brow clouded. It was not such a hopeful outlook as he had expected.

"Do you know his banker in Paris?"

"No. I haven't an idea what bank he uses."

"At what hotel does he stop?"

"I don't know that either."

"If it were a matter of life and death for you to get in touch with him, how would you go about it?"

She thought for a moment and then replied:

"I would wire every hotel in Paris where there was any chance of his being. And in case he had stopped at any one of them I would have my wire forwarded."

"Then do so now."

"Now?"

"Yes. I will get Angel to take me in to El Cerrito this afternoon. I'll leave in an hour and we ought to hear from Buel inside a few days."

He handed Mrs. Cass his fountain pen and went off to bribe the cochero to make another trip. Mr. Tooker had

a second and even stronger reason for wishing to go, beside the ostensible one which he had given. He was expecting a reply to the wire which he had sent on his arrival and was impatient to see it.

Three hours later, amidst a jingle of bells, a snapping of the whip and muttered curses, Angel drew his mules up in the plaza before the telegraph bureau, and Mr. Tooker alighted and entered. The wire he was anticipating was already there. After giving his name the blue envelope was handed him and he tore it apart and read:

"Mrs. J. de W. Cass and daughter, Miss Helena Cass of New York, were guests of this hotel for eight days. They left here September 7th, destination unknown, no forwarding address left. (Signed, Management of Hotel de la Paz, Madrid.)"

The consul felt curiously ashamed at this ratification of Mrs. Cass's word. Her story had been preposterous but the woman was not deranged as she had seemed, but had really travelled with a daughter. Helena Cass was a human being who had left Madrid with her mother less than a week ago, "destination unknown."

He read off the telegrams to be sent to the operator, as the man understood no English. His first thought after sending them was to remain in El Cerrito until replies came. But he realised Mrs. Cass needed his presence in Fuente la Higuera and returned that night. But before doing so he had made a bargain with Angel to bring the answers with him on his next trip.

When four days later Angel returned from El Cerrito with the laconic statement that there was no wire for Mrs. Cass her desperation was now at its most acute stage. Silence signified to her that Mr. Buel could not be traced and failing to ascertain where Helena had gone after leaving Brittany he had, perhaps, returned to America. In that case Mr. Buel's whereabouts was in no way correlative with that of Helena's. The American Consul's ability to discover fresh fortuity in each misfortune did not tend materially to ease her fears. Mr. Tooker insisted that one

of the Paris wires must have reached Buel and the fact that he had not seen fit to reply was conclusive proof that Miss Cass was with him.

"It stands to reason," he insisted, "that if Buel does *not* know where your daughter is he would be alarmed in receiving a wire from you asking if she is safe. On the other hand if they are together he will ignore your question so as to hinder you from rediscovering them."

At length Mrs. Cass allowed this theory to quiet her. On the evening of the seventh day since the wires had been sent Angel returned from El Cerrito. This time he fumbled in his coat and removed an envelope addressed to Señora Cass.

She read:

"Know nothing about Helena. Have not seen her since Brittany. Am leaving first train. Will be with you tomorrow. Jordan Buel."

It was sent from Madrid, where it had been forwarded from the Hotel Edward VII in Paris.

Mrs. Cass's face turned slowly ashen. Her eyes were stricken. She made no remark, but continued to look at Mr. Tooker, her entire expression accusatory.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I've evidently been too incredulous throughout. The whole experience has seemed so amazing. We've lost a week through this and yet it may be that he really knows. You saw her post a letter? You admitted that. Then why was he in Madrid unless they had arranged to meet? At least we shall find out to-morrow when he comes."

At nine o'clock next evening Jordan Buel entered the office of the fonda followed by two men.

XVII

"You don't know where she is?"

Mr. Buel hurled the question at Mrs. Cass without a word of preamble or previous recognition.

"No. We thought she was with you."

"Then you can't know Helena very well. Did you think she would desert you in a hole like this, at the mercy of these people? Why did you ever come here?"

"Helena wanted to do some sketching."

"Sketching!" He pronounced the word disdainfully. "She was restless and not herself. She didn't know what she wanted. You should never have allowed it."

He turned harassed eyes which took in the limitations of the room, noticed its other occupant and then returned to Mrs. Cass.

"Who is this man?" he asked. "Is he with you?"

"He is the American Consul from Madrid, who has tried to help me."

"Then he knows all about it?"

"Yes."

If Mrs. Cass had encouraged any hope that Mr. Buel was aware of Helena's escapade it was dissipated by his appearance. The man had evidently passed a sleepless night and his face was lined with anxiety. She realised that his seeming hostility was in no way the result of being unacceptable to Miss Cass's parents as a son-in-law. For the moment he had risen to a condition of unselfishness which she previously had thought not possible, wherein his only feeling was for Helena's safety. He had set aside all past prejudices and his anger was directed against the culpable neglect which alone he felt was responsible for Helena's loss.

"My name is Buel," he said, as he strode across the room

and extended his hand to Mr. Tooker. "I am engaged to Miss Cass, so this is more vital to me than to anyone else. I want to thank you for anything you've done. Just what has been done?"

"I'm afraid very little."

And then as Mr. Tooker hesitated before saying more, Mr. Buel interrupting his uncommunicativeness, said promptly:

"You can speak before these men. Señor Lopez is the best known detective in Madrid, so I have been assured, and Señor Rivas is his assistant. They both understand English. They will have to know just what has happened, and they might as well now as later."

The two men indirectly introduced had disposed of their luggage and, drawing up chairs, seated themselves beside Mr. Buel. Their faces kindled interest, their eyes glowed as though a fire burned behind each. Thus enjoined Mrs. Cass repeated her story for the most part without interruption. It was Mr. Buel who spoke first as the narrative was completed.

"Had Helena seemed just as usual before her disappearance?" he asked.

"I don't know what you mean by 'just as usual,'" Mrs. Cass replied, with momentary testiness. "She has seemed a difficult girl ever since she knew you."

"I don't mean that. Was she in good spirits?"

"No. I haven't thought Helena happy for some time."

"Why not?" he asked, sharply.

"Because of restlessness and discontent. I know that is supposed to be more or less a sign of the times. But I don't think that altogether explained it in Helena's case. I believe she had something on her mind which preyed upon her."

"Did you ever ask her?"

"No."

"Wouldn't that have been the simplest way of routing all doubts?"

"You don't understand the relationship which ex-

isted . . .” She hesitated, then corrected herself, “which exists between us.”

They saw at once that the turn of phrase had been uncontrolled and yet it expressed the thought in each mind. Was Helena alive now? Was it not more reasonable to suppose the girl had been killed and disposed of so that the answer to her disappearance would never be known? Mrs. Cass struggled for a moment to regain her composure and then continued:

“I never asked Helena questions. There was no act of self-sacrifice which she would not have willingly performed for me, or her brother and sister. But the smallest duty, if expected and an effort was made to coerce her, would have galled. I held my daughter’s confidence by never asking for it. We were very close together while in Paris.”

“Did Helena ever speak of me?”

“Yes.”

“What did she say?”

“Does that matter now?”

“Yes. More than ever. Don’t you suppose it occurs to me that words may be all I shall ever have from her again? That I may have to content myself with what you tell me? We’re hoping she’s alive, but is it likely?”

“Don’t say that!”

“What did Helena say?”

“She asked me to overcome her father’s bias against you.”

“Well?”

“Do you wish to know my answer?”

“Of course. You refused?”

“I told her I shared it and that I didn’t believe she really loved you. And she said . . .”

“Yes?”

“That she couldn’t live without you.”

Mr. Buel turned away, then rose and strode to the door, where he stood looking out into the night. He remained there several seconds, his face averted. The moonlight in the narrow rough paved street between limewashed houses

was brilliantly white. Now and then a shadow passed the door, but there was little noise. At length by heroic measures he superimposed calm and returned to them.

"This conversation took place in Paris?" he asked, speaking in a dead voice, and at her affirming he added: "What was the outcome of it?"

"I promised my consent to her marrying you if she would agree to neither seeing nor communicating with you for four months. If she still felt that she wanted to marry you at the end of that time I would raise no obstacle to prevent it."

"And did she agree?"

"Yes. But she broke her word the night before we left Madrid when she wrote to you."

"What do you know about that letter? She didn't read it to you?"

"No. I saw her post it."

"How do you know it was to me?"

"By the expression on her face."

"That proves nothing."

"But your presence in Madrid does. You would not have been there had she not sent for you. Will you read it to me?"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"I destroyed it."

"I have been honest with you. The least you can do is to tell me what she wrote."

"It was nothing that would be of assistance to us now. She wrote about Madrid and said she wished I was there. She spoke of plans to go into the mountains on a sketching tour, to a place recommended by artists, and said she would let me know the results of her pilgrimage. If the town lived up to expectations she wanted me to follow her and would let me know on arrival."

"Did she write you from here?"

"No. I hastened to Madrid as soon as I received her letter. I went at once to the de la Paz and they told me

you and Miss Cass had been there but had left. They did not know your plans or destination. And Helena had left no word for me. I waited over a week, each day expecting Helena would write, but I never heard until your wire came forwarded from Paris."

They were silent. The mere recounting seemed to place Helena very near to them, as though she might open the door any minute and ask why they were looking so prodigiously serious. They both remembered poignantly, her laugh, which was at first low and chuckling, almost silent, and later rose a sustained cadence like a singer's voice. People called her laugh "contagious."

Then Mr. Buel continued:

"You both arrived at midnight, and you saw Helena for the last time when you kissed her good-night, at about one o'clock. It was ten o'clock when you went to her room next morning, and she had vanished and all trace of her?"

"Yes."

"Then she evidently did not attempt to write to me that night before retiring or else . . ."

He paused.

Mrs. Cass spoke in a stoical voice:

"Finish your sentence."

"Or else she was killed before she posted it. For no letter reached the post. I should have thought she would have felt the need of a man here."

"Helena never had any sense of fear. She remarked the fonda was primitive but clean and she thought we were going to be quite happy."

The detectives, who by this time had listened to the story throughout, now wished to go above stairs and see room "number five," and to renew the incidents as they had been related. Don Rodolfo was not in his room. He was not in the habit of returning from the venta until three or four in the morning, and then slept until noonday. As the detectives examined the room they questioned Mrs. Cass for details of it as it had appeared to her on the evening of their arrival. She repeated descriptions of a tester bed

under curtains and walls embowered in fuchsias and love birds. Already the account sounded foreign to the fonda and she found herself wondering if the room had really looked as she remembered. Other happenings had crowded out the vision of the room until it seemed less real than a vivid dream terminated by a sudden awakening.

The detectives interviewed Don Pedro, Maria de la Concepcione and Don Rodolfo. They told the same story as before. When assured that Miss Cass had been seen and recognised and was known to have come to Fuente la Higuera, they marvelled. They had not seen her. They knew they were no longer believed and their efforts to impugn Mrs. Cass's sanity were useless, but they did not vary their original statements. It mattered little that their inquisitors knew they were all criminally implicated, since they had destroyed all evidence.

The detectives talked with the alcalde and townsmen and though they realised a crime had been committed, they could say no evil of Don Pedro. Of Don Rodolfo they were more guarded in their terms of praise. He had lived in the town over several months, and there were rumours in Cuesta del Espinal, where he came from, that he had been guilty of stealing sheep and performing other outrages. The men of Fuente la Higuera liked not to play cards with him since he had a facility in winning which suggested dishonourable means. But although every effort had been made in which to entrap him, they had failed to find him guilty, and in the meantime he continued to win the small earnings of the neighbours.

Cards were also Don Pedro's one passion, for drink, it appeared, was rarely the vice of the Spaniard. His brain was crafty, full of tricks but never befuddled. It seemed Maria de la Concepcione was not his *amiga* as seemed more natural, but actually his wife. So far as could be ascertained his life had been blameless in the past and for years back he had lived well within the boundaries of law and order, or else in his crimes had shown exceptional agility in dodging all suspicion.

At the end of a few days, not satisfied that the detectives had made any perceptible headway against the darkness which enshrouded the disappearance, Mr. Buel placed the case in the hands of the Guardia Civile. Following this, an account of Miss Cass's disappearance appeared in every newspaper in Spain. Already a week had passed and their results were as discouraging as those of Mrs. Cass and Mr. Tooker unaided. From the Spanish press the news was copied in the Paris edition of the New York *Herald*, followed by all the papers of France, England and Italy. In less than forty-eight hours the case became celebrated throughout Europe. Americans travelling abroad asked themselves what could have happened. They were inclined to scepticism over the usual disappearance but this seemed a matter of actual kidnapping. Of course the girl would be found, they agreed, as one couldn't vanish and not leave some trace somewhere. And in the meantime it did provide a *passe-temps* to speculate on what had happened.

Coupled with the agony of her loss, Mrs. Cass realised the responsibility to her family in America. She had been careful not to write her fears until a vigorous search had been instigated, and then, following the disheartening days in which no conclusions were arrived at, she knew she could wait no longer. Before the news had passed outside of Spain she cabled Mr. Cass that Helena was lost.

XVIII

A DOZEN pairs of dirty hands were extended to carry Jay Sefton's bag as he stepped onto the platform at El Cerrito from the Madrid *expresso* next day. He looked at the shrewd young faces before him and decided that he wished to carry his own bag himself. Taking several centimos from his pocket he hurled them into the plaza and there followed a scramble from the group of boys whose sole occupation seemed to wait upon the chances of fulfilling small commissions from arriving trains. As they rolled over on the flagging in their fight for coppers a group of startled pigeons took to the upper air.

Mr. Sefton turned to the station master to inquire about the diligence to Fuente la Higuera. Learning that there was a half hour before it was scheduled to leave and perhaps longer he went to the hotel and despatched a hasty meal. Upon returning he was stopped by a street-vendor selling clasp-knives. He purchased one, not knowing precisely what use it was to answer, but feeling it was a wise possession placed it in his kit-bag.

At the diligence he found another fellow traveller awaiting the arrival of the *cochero*. And from him he learnt that Angel had met with a serious mishap a few months before, due to his unfortunate habit of refreshing himself at the halfway house. One of the mules had been killed in driving off the embankment while he was inebriate, and Angel himself, although that was a small matter, had been crippled for several months. The present driver, who appeared presently, was middle-aged with only one remaining eye, a cast having completely covered the other, and was therefore known to all the travellers as "El Tuerto." He was an evil-looking man, his face thin and bloodless, his jaw unshaven, his clothes ill-cared for.

As Sefton took his place beside the *cochero* on the front seat he felt there was every chance of his having occasion to use his knife. Within the diligence were three travellers, the *cura*, an elderly man in *soutane* and shovel-hat, and two townsmen. The one-eyed pulled out his whip, and the mules after quivering in anticipation of his blows sprang forward and in a moment they were clear of the streets of the town. In the night beyond the scene became purely one of conjecture.

Sefton attempted from time to time some sort of conversation with the one-eyed, but the *cochero* seemed morose, not given to exchanges of confidences, and he learnt little from him. The trip would have been tedious but for the recklessness of his driving which skirted a dozen potential deaths. They stopped at the darkened *venta* only long enough to discharge merchandise and then continued. An hour later their journey ended. The *cura* and the two travellers bade each other "buenos noches" and separated, going in different directions.

Making his way to the *fonda*, Sefton found a light still burning and a welcome waiting for him from the *posadero*. Don Pedro grasped his kit-bag from his unwilling hand, saying fluently: "My poor house and all that is in it are yours." Room number eight, it appeared, was at the traveller's disposal and Don Pedro made as if to climb the stairs when Mr. Sefton detained him.

"There is only one room in the *fonda* which I want," he said, "and that is number five."

The Spaniard's fine eyes flickered for a moment and his features became inscrutable as though a mirror that reflected a face had suddenly been breathed upon. Then he set down his candle.

"The Señor has spoken. I am sorry if no other room will suit him, but number five is already engaged."

Mr. Sefton picked up his bag.

"Then I shall have to look elsewhere for quarters. Since the village does not boast another *casa de huéspedes* perhaps the *alcalde* or the *cura* will take in a stranger."

The *posadero's* face was suddenly lit with an animation that could be called forth at will. His eyes sparkled like black diamonds and he smiled, laying bare a double row of milk-white teeth.

"Wait a moment," he said, placing a brown hand upon his arm. "Do not be in a hurry to leave my house. Room number five is not engaged . . . only I am loath to let you have it. I am superstitious. I tell you this frankly: some disaster attends every person who occupies that room, and so I had decided not to rent it again. Now, number eight is very comfortable."

"Señor, already I absolve you of any duplicity. I am not superstitious. Let me assure you, nothing *will* happen to me in number five. Or if it does, it will *not* be your fault."

"You are very brave, Señor."

"My courage does not warrant your compliment."

"It shall be as you wish. Only tell me how you have heard of this room."

His eyes glittered and he covered his teeth with full over-red lips. They were not the lips of an anchorite, Sefton mused, as he attempted a better understanding of the knave.

"Two English ladies, sisters, who were artists, stopped here over three years ago. And they told me of the room."

For a moment his face remained a blank in the process of attempting to place these people in his shifting memory, but presently he gave it up with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Doubtless, but I have forgotten them. Many, many people come to my house. Always it is crowded, so I cannot remember them. But Señor has the room of his choice. At all costs I wish the Señor happy."

Sefton bowed ceremoniously.

"Your hospitality is exceeded only by your goodness of heart."

A few minutes later, having registered upon a strip of paper that was inserted in the visitors-book, he followed Don Pedro upstairs. His host unlatched and threw open

the door of number five and entering set down the candle on the table by the bedside. The room had changed in no detail from the description Consul Tooker had given him. He was amazed by the accuracy of the man's memory. Bare white walls, a tiled floor, furnished with a narrow bed that suggested a sleepless night, two chairs, a table and an armoire. Above the bed was an ebony crucifix to which was nailed a silver Christ.

Don Pedro placed the bag on the floor in front of the window and parted the curtains, then turned to his guest, his manner begging commendation.

"It is undeniably a pleasant room," Mr. Sefton said, conscious of its cold and dampness.

"It is no more than befits you. But there is not another like it in Fuente la Higuera. I, Pedro, tell you so."

Arrangements for breakfast were settled, and then Don Pedro went below stairs. Sefton looked dubiously at the bed and his eyes made the circuit of the bare walls. He glanced at his watch. It was just ten o'clock. He picked up his hat, went downstairs and let himself out.

The village was closed for the night and the streets through which he strolled were deserted or almost so. A red star glowed at the corner beneath a shrine where some penitent had besought indulgences. Occasionally a dull lighted square showed behind a curtained grille. Sefton strolled across the market-place, passed the church, the *alcaldia*, the better dwellings of the village. He made a complete tour of the village twice and then entered the *estaneo* where tobacco and lottery tickets were sold. He purchased stamps here from the woman behind her counter, who was at the moment busily engaged in nursing her baby. At a marble-topped table two men were occupied at a game of dominoes. The room was blue with smoke from them and their companions watching the game. He was kept waiting a few minutes while the young widow disengaged herself from her domestic preoccupations, and the onlookers took this opportunity to salute the stranger, and wish him well. When the woman was free to attend to

his needs he noticed as she handed him the stamps that her fingers were tobacco-stained. Weighing the leaf in bulk upon the government scales it seemed was her chief affair, since her patrons made each his own cigarettes. Good-nights were called to him as he left the *estaneo* and he felt the curse of being a stranger had been lifted.

Returning to the *fonda*, he mounted the stair, entered his room, undressed and lay down for the night. For a long time he remained quiet in the dark, the thought of sleep distant. He had no fear of anything that could be done to him in that ill-fated room, but he recoiled from fresh surmises of what had happened to Miss Cass. A revisualisation of Don Pedro persisted in the dark which all his will power could not dissolve. He saw the olive face, the eyes black and stinging, the curiously dark flesh that surrounded them. He could not blot out of his mind the bared teeth glistening beneath the lips of a voluptuary. His mouth was unlike that of any European he had ever seen. It was the colour of a hibiscus flower, an unnatural red, soft, like one of the great red carnations Spanish women wore in their hair. The fancy of those lips torturing Helena Cass, seering her flesh, purposeful, burning like a branding-iron, made him turn on his bed.

And then he thought once again of the *posadero's* eyes, cunning, practical, and they seemed to deny the indulgence of the mouth. His eyes were not those of a man who gave free-rein to his impulses. Sefton had to admit that although he was able to read most people, the unfamiliar physiognomy of a subtle race in which was commingled the furtiveness of the Arab and the simplicity of the Moor, held him captive. He did not know what had happened to Helena, or what influences had been at work.

He was awakened next morning by Concha, who tapped upon his door, and not waiting for his answer entered the room. She felt no timidity in finding him still in bed, for to her a man was never a man unless a Spaniard. Foreigners were people who paid for things, but aside from their pocketbooks no other portion of them functioned.

First she closed the window with a grunt of disapproval, that anyone could survive so stupid an upbringing that included sleeping in *une corriente*. Then she disappeared and returned carrying a *brasier* with a few live coals and a small pair of bellows. These were placed on one side of the bed to temper the cold room, after which she placed a tray across his knees holding a cup of thick chocolate and *buñuelos*. Then she left as stolidly as she had come.

He knew that his being in Fuente la Higuera without occupation had seemed suspicious and condemnatory to both Don Pedro and his Concha. He did not doubt that they knew his real reason for being there. And yet if it were possible to deceive them he realised it was worth attempting. Therefore, during a long talk that evening with the *posadero* he explained that he was a novelist and was travelling in Spain for the purpose of writing a book about the country. To supplement this he was able to show pages of manuscript. He knew Don Pedro doubted him but was impressed.

During the days which followed he began a careful investigation of room number five. The rooms adjoining his were unoccupied. In fact he was the only guest at the *fonda* except for two Spaniards, travelling merchants or the like. He had attempted conversation with them and concluded that they could in no way be useful to him. Sefton felt he was not watched while in his room. He had purchased a bottle of ink and when he went out he left a disorder of paper on the table and floor to carry out the impression that he had been writing. In reality he had removed several tiles from the floor and had continued systematic rappings on the walls, to see if there could be any disused or secret passageway where victims could be hidden. Several days were given over to this search which he soon abandoned as wasted time, and once more continued his walks through the town.

One afternoon he decided to make a call upon the *Alcalde* and directing his steps thither he rang and was admitted to the sitting-room of that dignitary. After a wait of several

minutes the *Alcalde* was summoned and appeared drowsily from an interrupted siesta. Mr. Sefton apologised for his inopportune visit, but when the hospitable Spaniard learnt that his guest was writing a book about Spain he ordered a bottle of Manzanilla and his best *dolces*. He inquired if Mr. Sefton was pleasantly installed at the *fonda*, and was gratified to learn that his comfort was being provided for and that his impressions of the village were commendatory.

"I heard of Fuente la Higuera," Mr. Sefton remarked, "through two English sisters, spinsters, who came here three years ago to paint. They told me it was picturesque." "So?"

"Yes. I think one of them made a sketch of someone at the *fonda*. Don Rodolfo . . . Could that have been the name?"

The *Alcalde* shook his head.

"There was such a man here, but he has gone away."

"When did he go?"

"A year or more."

"Is he alive?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Where is he now?"

"I couldn't say, Señor. He's at one of the villages nearby, I suppose. A very undesirable character. He and Don Pedro had a falling out and to-day they are bitter enemies."

"What was his profession?"

"I would rather not say."

While Sefton ate the candied honey and pine nuts and drained his glass of Manzanilla a plan formed in his mind which was placed in execution next day. Accordingly he left Fuente la Higuera abruptly and began his search.

Don Pedro came to the door and watched him leave, a dampened cigarette hanging dejectedly from the corner of his mouth undisturbed by his volubility. Sefton had made him a present after paying his bill, assuring him of his probable return. It was still early to avow his enmity to the man; instead he saluted him with a final "Hasta la Vista." Then he entered the *tartana* and jogged away

behind the *burro* down the mountain, seated beside the driver, his bag strapped at the rear.

The services of the One Eyed could not be engaged as he had decided to set out to Cuesta del Espinal, the nearest village, in his hunt for Don Rodolfo, and the roadway was too narrow for the diligence. He was counting heavily on the hostility between Don Rodolfo and the *posadero* as the instrument to give him his information. Revenge was one of the staples of primitive character and Don Rodolfo could be urged to tell anything, or so he argued, as long as it was to the detriment of his past friend.

During the two weeks that followed Sefton visited every village within a radius of many kilometres, each in turn disheartening. It was on the afternoon he set out to Cindra that he began to feel the weight of his discouragement. He made the journey on foot, as his guide apologised for his need of walking. He explained that his she-ass was with foal and he, poor man, owned no other animal. The distance was less than three kilometres and Sefton was glad of the exercise. They were an oddly assorted pair as they set out, the American in well-cut knickerbockers and woolen stockings that showed his spare figure to advantage, his cap pulled down over his eyes, a walking-stick in his hand. The *capa* in which the peasant usually muffled himself was strapped to his back and the bag on the end of a stick slung across his shoulder, while they walked one in front of the other. Sefton, who noticed his companion was not young, offered to carry the bag, once when it was placed on the roadside while his guide rested. But the countryman looked at him reproachfully:

"Do not think I would allow a *caballero* to do this work. . . . No, Señor. Tia Juan is made for this. He is fit for nothing better."

Prickly pears grew raggedly along their road and they approached coverts of bluish coloured aloes. Here and there were strips of Spanish pine trees, the lower branches lopped off for fire wood, only the upper foliage left like elongated plumes.

It was dusk when they approached the village and Sefton's heart leapt within him as he noticed in the mountainside the caves of the gypsies. They were discernible even at a distance by their whitewashed entrances. A great spray of smoke rose from the midst of their encampment against the acid green of the evening sky. There was evidence of haste and signs of an intended removal from the camp. As they drew near men and women of the tribe vociferated among themselves and then were sullen as the stranger passed. His guide crossed himself.

"Spawn of hell," he muttered. "Cursed heretics."

They entered the gates of the town and found a vivacious group of girls at the fountain in the plaza drawing water. He watched them with admiration, their splendid upright carriage, balancing their great earthenware *botijos* on their shoulders as they moved away. His guide led him to the door of the *fonda* where he inquired if Don Rodolfo was known and learnt that he was still an inmate of the village.

Sefton slept little that night. The excitement of being in the same town with Don Rodolfo was not to be gainsaid. At last he was on the threshold of a great discovery. He arose next morning before the *fonda* was stirring and had to wait interminably for his breakfast. At ten o'clock, having received instructions of the man's address, he set out alone, thinking it best that the ruffian's suspicions should be in no way aroused by his providing himself with witnesses. He made his way to the poorest street on the outskirts of the village. The centre of the narrow *calle* formed a sink where past rains had been insufficient to carry away the waste that choked it. Odours of animals that frequented the interiors of these hovels and rancid cookery outraged his nostrils.

The house where Don Rodolfo lived was one of extreme abjection. An old woman sat in the doorway making lace, throwing the bobbins with her withered hands. They leapt and danced upon her lap as he had seen beans dance that were inhabited by worms. She put down the intricate pattern, of which a large portion was already finished, and

looked at him again. Her dry old lips articulated his question after him when he asked if Don Rodolfo could be seen. Then she entered the house which contained one room and standing at the foot of a ladder that went up the side of the wall she gave a strange animal cry.

Sefton heard a movement above. The floor responded to a shifting of weight. Then followed a rustle as though the person were lying on straw or husks. A moment later a face appeared in the aperture, thin, ravaged, with bitter black eyes, the brow of one lifted—by an old knife-wound.

"Who wants me, mother?"

The crone gave an inarticulate sound indicating Sefton, who stood in the doorway. Then she returned once more to her work and the bobbins continued their crazy activity. The men eyed each other a moment without speech. In that moment Don Rodolfo seemed anticipatory of anyone of a dozen misfortunes that had ridden him to ground. His eyes, radio-active, pierced Sefton's composure. Then feeling he had nothing to fear, his usual appearance of insensibility returned and he asked who his visitor was and what he might require.

Sefton removed his gold cigarette-case and lighted a cigarette. He saw the man's eyes blaze through half-shut lids at the gesture. Then he remarked if Don Rodolfo would do him the honour to come downstairs he would like a few minutes' conversation with him. The face thrust out of the darkness, paled in spite of its olive skin, hesitated, sought the depository of the gold cigarette-case and agreed to join him directly.

Jay Sefton strolled in front of the hovel, breathing deep of the air to exhaust the inhalations of the stinking room. He turned in a moment at an imperceptible sound and found Don Rodolfo silent-footed beside him. The clothes in which he had dressed himself consisted only of a ragged coat and trousers, bare feet thrust into loose slippers. He took the cigarette Mr. Sefton offered him with a greedy hand which showed how low a level his misfortunes had reached since he was no longer able to supply himself with

tobacco. His coat without buttons hung open and he saw the man's coffee-coloured body through a rent in his shirt in which his ribs lay bare. The miserable fellow's condition was one of positive penury.

"What do you want with me, Señor?"

"To know what became of the Señorita Cass."

"The Señorita Cass? I know no such person."

"You will allow me the privilege of differing to the extent of not believing your words. Don Pedro has told me his version of her disappearance, for which he says you were responsible. In self-defense it seems to me you should tell me just what happened."

The man loosened horrible imprecations. He smote his temples, feeling a rage plethoric, impotent, that all but strangled him. He questioned the legitimacy of his enemy's birth. One of his parents had been a goat. Then at length he cried, through his teeth, his jaws clenched:

"He told you that?"

"Yes. You see it is obvious he can do you further harm. You haven't benefited yourself just at present. And of course if you tell me what I want to know I shall make you a present."

It required no further urging. Sefton knew he could profit by Don Rodolfo's position. It was understood they were to lunch at noonday at a *venta* outside the town. Mr. Sefton was pledged to provide a meal and wine, and to make his guest an already stipulated gift of confidence, for which consideration he was to hear the truth.

"*Vaya!*" Rodolfo cried. "You shall hear all you wish of that . . . that rat-scorpion . . . that spider-crab. . . . You shall hear."

The Inn of the Stars was a not unfriendly spot for all that it seemed to cling to the side of the mountain more through a faith in Saint Trinidad than through any architectural support. Part of its construction overhung a ravine and below at a great depth was an ochre flow of sullen water that had worn its course deep into the rocks. It had been said that no rascal planning his victim's destruction

but attempted to urge his coming to this place. But it had its pleasanter associations. It was the favorite haunt for a *merienda*, and the cheerful host had a light hand on the guitar and could frequently be urged to play for the young women to instruct their elders how the *jota* should be danced.

The inn was approached by a small cork wood, most of the trees badly lacerated showing red through their removed bark. And close to the ravine, their roots exposed, were a group of eucalypti. Their leaves were the shape of pendant scimiters and in every breeze they continued their incessant whispering. One of the trees had broken into premature blossom and its great height was covered with a foam of flower.

Sefton met Don Rodolfo two hours later, according to appointment, in the road before the *venta*. During his absence the Spaniard had made no apparent change in his very limited apparel. The meal had already been ordered and was being prepared. The breeze brought the odours of roasting kid cooked out of doors over a fire behind the inn. A private-room for lunch was practically unheard-of, but it was finally arranged that their meal should be served them upstairs where they should remain undisturbed. All the delights of a gastronome were placed on the white cloth before them. Roasted meat, a *pisto*, a traditional dish of eggs and pimento, cinnamon paste and Murviedo cheese.

Don Rodolfo took his wine at a single draught. With a piece of bread he scoured his plate to wipe up the sauce and swallowed it wolfishly. His hand trembled as he helped himself a second time to the *pisto*. He took a piece of flesh up in his fingers and tore at it with his teeth carnivorously. It was obvious the man hadn't tasted food in days. His hunger was distressing to witness and its appeasement revolted. Sefton moved his chair and sat smoking, refusing the sweets and fruit, but Don Rodolfo helped himself to each dish in turn.

At length his guest's rapacity eased, having over-eaten himself, Sefton offered his cigarette-case. Don Rodolfo

lighted one and moved his chair away from the table with a groan. Events had undoubtedly gone against him since he and Don Pedro had quarrelled. He ground an epithet between his teeth. Sefton took out his wallet. It contained the money he had promised.

"Now, Don Rodolfo," he cried.

The man's face was crafty as he began his story, but later some of the passion of it carried conviction. It wasn't entirely, so the listener decided, a matter of playing up to what was expected in exchange for a fee. But there were times when Sefton rose from his chair in horror, and then he as hastily reseated himself, fearing in any way to break the continuity. Much of what was said was extravagant; most of it was untrue, particularly those parts in which he was concerned. But Sefton's eclectic mind sifted and retained those portions of the story which were likely until he felt that he had entered into the mental processes of their victim.

XIX

AFTER Miss Cass had kissed her mother good night she closed and locked her door and then remained standing before it, at a loss to know what to do next. It was one o'clock. She realised it was time she retired and yet she felt particularly rebellious at the thought of sleep.

She remained for a while lost in thought, her eyes fastened upon the enclosing walls with their fantastic decorations of fuchsias on a yellow ground, each bouquet ornamented with love birds. Her thoughts returned to Jordan Buel, as they had at short intervals throughout the day past. Miss Cass had agreed to write him on her arrival, that he might know her plans. The necessity of not keeping faith with her mother was abhorrent to her, yet she satisfied herself on this point by deciding she would tell her in the morning that she had written Buel for a second time since making her promise in Paris not to. She attempted to reassure herself that her open declaration would in itself absolve her of disobedience.

She removed the fountain pen and paper from her bag and drew up a rush-bottomed chair before the dressing-table, since this was the only flat surface the room contained upon which she could write. She was hesitating as to her mode of address, when she bethought herself that she did not know where to leave her letter and the night clerk below stairs had probably retired at this hour. The diligence which plied between Fuente la Higuera and El Cerrito made the trip only twice a week so that her letter could not go on the morrow.

This decided her and she was in the act of putting away pen and paper when she caught sight of her reflection in the glass before her. The look in her eyes, ugly, accusatory, filled her with fear. Surely those were not her eyes.

She had never looked like that. She was looking into a particularly distorted mirror, she reassured herself. Miss Cass opened her dressing bag and took from it her own hand-glass. She held it close to the candle, and she who was without vanity slowly surveyed her features, as a scientist might the peripheries of some recently discovered phenomena. On the plastic mask of her face she appeared to "try on" certain expressions. But after several minutes of attention she was still shocked by the rigour of her face, an expression of determination, dogged, steadfast, a boldness of eye, and a compression of lips that had become permanent. . . . She slipped the hand-glass back into her bag and began her preparations for the night.

She removed the pins from her hair, brushed it methodically until its thick blackness glistened, then plaited it swiftly. Her clothes she cast over the back of a chair, slipped on a nightdress and threw over it a peignoir of dark silk. Then she moved the chair close to her bed, balanced the candle in the middle of it since there was no table she could use, and cautiously got into bed. This performance was despatched in five minutes, and then feeling that sleep was deferred for several hours she opened a new volume of *La Pardo-Bazan* which she had attempted to read on the train.

She read several pages automatically and then found herself drowsily wondering at the meaning of quite simple words. She reread whole sentences where the meaning had eluded her. But she found after going over them a second and a third time that they were no clearer. Her brain felt curiously numb and it suddenly occurred to her that she must be falling asleep. She stupidly laid aside the book and making an immense effort at wakefulness, she raised herself on one elbow and managed to blow out her candle. A little light entered the room from the window which gave on to the street, but the draperies which fell from the canopy kept the occupant of the bed in complete darkness, and almost at once she was asleep.

As Miss Cass wakened she remembered thinking she

must have been exhausted, for sleep had been dreamless, and only a loud and insistent sound could have aroused her. With a return to a sentient state she wondered what the noise could have been.

There was no movement in her room; no sound. Yet with a suddenness that was animal she realised she was not alone. Even then she did not open her eyes. She was conscious of the changed beating of her pulse. Little hammers were striking themselves upon all parts of her body. She attempted to control her breathing into long, slow, natural breaths, so that whoever the occupant might be he should remain deceived.

She heard a rustling behind the curtains of her bed, and realised it must be a rat and was about to rise and light her candle. Her eyes were open now, piercing the darkness although she could not decipher anything. At that moment she heard a slippered foot on the tiled floor. To her thoroughly roused senses the sound was loud although her critical sense told her it was almost inaudible. The sweat formed on her forehead. Her hands were moist with fear. She who had never known what it was to be afraid was now drained by fright.

Her feelings did not permit an analysis. She knew her fear was occasioned less by her discovery than by her inability to explain the purpose of the visit. She wondered if she had moved upon waking and that had deterred the intruder from further investigation. She waited. The sound was not repeated. She was almost ready to pass over the experience as an hallucination of half wakefulness. The only efficient means of proving this was to leap out of bed and look behind the curtains.

Miss Cass was about to put this plan into action when she heard once again the sound of a slippered foot on the floor. He had taken another noiseless step. She knew instinctively it was the night clerk. She asked herself what had been his method of ingress. By the window? . . . No. He had a pass key. She wondered that she had not

suspected the man's plausibility before. The strange Moorish face . . . the sensitive dark hands!

What did he want?

The thought stiffened the hair of her head. She lay rigid. He was close now. Suddenly she felt the pillow under her lifted ever so adroitly while his hand was inserted to see what was hidden there. His search was deliberate. The pillow was not lowered until the hand had made ample exploration notwithstanding that it remained unrewarded. Next she could feel it burrowing under the mattress.

He leaned over her. Did he know she was not asleep? That this was only pretence? She was aware of the man's bitter breath, his face close to her own. . . . She was lying with her left arm underneath her, and it was her left hand that wore the navette-shaped diamond. She knew now what he wanted; it was her ring.

He drew her right hand from underneath the counterpane and then replaced it gently. He lifted her body ever so slightly and removed her left hand from under her. Her ring fitted closely below her knuckle but he had no difficulty in removing it. A feeling half fear, half indignation shook her as he drew it from her finger.

Surely he knew she was not asleep! He knew she was afraid to cry out or defy him!

There was a pause. Was he examining the ring? Would he go now? Through closed lids she was aware that the light in the room was stronger. Had he lighted a taper? She thought to half open her eyes. As she did so she realised he was bending above her, watching her in closest scrutiny.

She was wearing a necklace under the lace and ribbon of her nightdress. She felt his fingers pulsing below her throat. With his hand upon her bosom she was no longer able to simulate sleep. The touch of him upon her breast outraged her. It brought her heart up into her throat. Each blow of it was physical pain. She opened her eyes and sat up in bed.

Her first discovery was that the night clerk had lighted the candle which burned on the dressing table behind the bed. Although the circumference of the room was clear she herself was still in shadow. She looked into the face before her. She saw the gleam of white teeth out of the dark oval, and remembered those on each side of his mouth in his upper jaw, pointed like a wolf's. He had raised his arm to shelter his face from her sight, but she cried out stridently:

"I see your face. I know who you are."

She attempted to rise, to rush to the window with a cry of "auxilio . . . auxilio!" But a weight held her down. She struggled.

"The señorita is mistaken. The señorita has not seen me."

"I have. I have. You admitted us last night. You served supper to my mother and me."

She attempted to wrench herself free, and then was borne down as it seemed to her into the bed. Her head was buried into the pillow. She was breathing feathers. They stuck in her throat. Her temples were bursting with a grinding pain. Her eyes burned in their sockets. She felt they were being drawn out of her skull. And the pain at her throat was intolerable. Yet she could not cry out, could not move. Could only suffer . . . suffer as she fell . . . for she was falling through limitless space into unrelieved darkness. Her throat still burned but the remaining parts of her were congealed, were turning slowly to ice . . . were ice.

XX

DON PEDRO stepped back from his work trembling. The young señorita lay in a crumpled heap across the foot of the bed. The light of the concealed candle was enough to show the bruise on her throat, the tongue which protruded from the mouth, and her eyes—*Dios de mi Alma!* They were not good to see, those eyes!

He leaned against the wall weak with fright. He had not intended killing the señorita. Nothing had been further from his intentions. She was rich and he and his Concepcione were poor. He had not wished her any bodily harm, so he assured himself. His thoughts already took the form of excuse and palliative, yet he knew no explanation of his would curb the investigation of the Guardia Civile. And all he had wanted was a little money.

He had pulled off small tricks among foreigners before and gone unscathed. He had wanted the ring, 100 or 150 *reales* if possible and the necklace. He would have buried them and months later have converted them into gold while in Cordoba in the Calle de los Ucedas or if need be in Madrid. His discretion would have remained unimpeached. But he had been frightened. She had evidently not touched the aguardiente for she had wakened easily and seen his face. He had thought only of self-preservation. Instead of stopping her cries he had committed murder. . . . He damned himself for using so much strength. He took out a handkerchief and drew it across a wet brow and then wiped his slim mahogany hands, the long taper fingers that could strangle. He had been too zealous this time. He had overdone his job.

He looked at her where she lay, the Señorita Inglesa, with her terrible sightless eyes convicting him of crime. He realised she could not be left there. And yet murder

had been so far in excess of his plans that, for the moment, he did not know what to do.

His first act was to tear a sheet from the bed and throw it over her. But the settling of the folds about her young body revealed the corpse beneath. The broken lines of her were as completely visible as though the impress of murder were woven into the coarse cotton. Don Pedro was afraid. It was his only offence that had been committed with an absence of strategy which would betray him to the duller wits of his neighbours. This was rapine and butchery. This could not be hidden. The whole burrio would know of it. He crept downstairs to tell Concepcione.

A few moments later Maria de la Concepcione, or Concha as she was familiarly called, fully dressed, mounted the stairs and entered number five. In spite of a superstitious fear of death she had been given her instructions. It was her business to fulfil them. True the cards had already predicted that Pedro would come to an untimely end. Therefore since *El Demonio* had whispered to her *hombre* a means to conceal his infamy, it was not for her to insist lest she herself be punished by the *aojo*.

She plucked the sheet from the body. If she experienced any protest or recoil, she at least mastered the physical essentials. She dressed it in the clothes she found upon the chair, even to boots, hat and veil. Every object connected with the young woman was replaced, the ring upon her finger, the necklace about her throat. Though she were to be found later on there must be no evidence that she had been robbed. The candle flickered, ends of wick flaring fitfully. The corpse propped into unnatural positions made grotesque shadows on the wall. Several times Concepcione crossed herself to avert evil and muttered: "*Por amor de Dios.*"

When the work was completed the sweat had made runnels down her cheeks. In a struggle against fear, she felt an equal trepidation of Pedro with that of the supernatural. The corpse clad, it was wrapped hastily in an old quilt. Concepcione then shouldered the weight and opened the

door. There was no one moving in the passage. Cautiously she made the descent carrying her burden.

She entered the office and pushed open the door to the kitchen. She stood there a moment listening. She tapped quietly on the outer door which admitted to the *patio*.

While she had discharged her duty above stairs Pedro had not remained idle. He had drawn out the old carriage into the middle of the stone-paved *patio* and harnessed the asses to it. His own harness was ornamented with jingling bells. In place of this he had substituted a crude patching of cloth and esparto grass. The animals, little accustomed to being roused in the middle of the night, stood timorously together, their heads touching, their tails drawn between their legs. Don Pedro did not curse them as usual. Moving noiselessly as a cat across the tiles he emerged from the straw loft. He placed the straw on the bottom of the *carreta*. Upon this he signalled to Concepcione the body was to be deposited.

Following his silent instructions, Concha revisited the upper room. She returned carrying the dressing-bag, walking-stick and box of drawing materials. A pair of slippers and a litter of smaller articles her acumen had prompted her to gather into a square of bright cotton, the ends of which were tied together *guitana*-fashion. These were placed beside the body and over all was laid a covering of straw.

There remained nothing more to be given attention before starting. The animals' hoofs had been packed with mud. Don Pedro opened the door which communicated with the narrow *calle*. Making certain that no one loitered in the thick darkness of the doorways across the street he spoke to his donkeys. At a whisper they moved forward, guided by him as he walked at their side carrying a prod. Concepcione went to the door and watched them as they set off down the silent street, a strange death cortege. The asses' hoofs on the paving were almost noiseless. The only sound was the turn of the wooden wheels of the old *carreta*. Murmuring "*Maria Santisima, le guarde,*" she crossed

herself and went within before they had turned the corner.

Don Pedro knew the streets of Fuente la Higuera as well as he knew the palm of his own right hand. It was therefore a simple matter for him to select those streets wherein his chances of observation were minimised. There were only two wine-shops that remained open until morning. The noise within these was intense so that it was possible that Don Pedro might have passed their lighted doorways unremarked.

He guided the donkeys, however, from the elbow of the street across the market place where most of the alleys debouched. This was now deserted, the stalls empty of produce. From here he made his way down a succession of narrow black spaces, over ruts and uneven pavements. Had Don Pedro not known the byways of Fuente la Higuera as well through impenetrable darkness as by light, he could not have guided the pair. But at a corner the donkeys turned abruptly and a rear wheel went over the high curbstone. The carreta pitched violently. Then as the solid disk of the wheel was dashed against the stone the noise of it burst between the narrow walls like a percussion. A voice behind a grated window called:

"Quien Vive?"

Don Pedro placed a hand on the bridle of the near animal. They had turned the corner and now stood silent. He wondered if the asses' breathing could be heard. He waited. There followed no further interrogation. No light flashed in the alley, so they continued. They left the town by the Puerta del Norte and drove into the open country.

Less than a kilometre from the town was a location which had been in recent use as encampment for gipsies. This tribe of gitanos was in small favour in Fuente la Higuera, both on account of theft and because of the belief that they had brought a visitation of lice and miseria.

The only member of the town who had been in communication with them was the stranger known as Don Rodolfo. Rodolfo, a thief by inclination, was a specialised sheep-robber by profession. Claiming to be the friend of

the gitanos he proved himself their superior in guile. Following every transaction with him they loosened horrible imprecations and cast their knives into the ground.

Don Pedro recognised a valuable acquaintance in him and offered shelter with the understanding that he share in his increment. One of the fundamentals of Don Rodolfo's success was his knowledge whom to cheat and whom not to. He had made a mistake once and carried henceforth the mark of it in the knife thrust which lifted one brow and gave his face a curiously inquiring look. He saw in his host a man of parts; their relationship remained one of scrupulous integrity.

The open country across which Don Pedro travelled was mostly waste land used for grazing, but following continued draughts now worn barren as a hide. At length Pedro ordered the asses to halt. Upon discovering the spot where the gipsy fires had burned he made his way down the side of the mountain. Here after investigating some shrubbery he pushed aside its branches. Striking a match he found an opening in the rocks. It was as he thought. This was the spot Don Rodolfo had described where the gipsies had kept their stores. It was depleted now, but would serve very well. He allowed himself the cynical smile of the man to whom obstacles are created only that he may override them.

He returned to the carreta, carried the straw and made a bed of it under the rocks. The body was committed to this rough pallet. He left the señorita where he had thrown her, lying upon her back, her head straining away from her body as though the delicate stem of her throat had been snapped. Beside her were those possessions which his prudence had urged to take from her room.

Don Pedro paused for a moment before leaving. He was aware of a feeling he could not define. The fear of the criminal who has overreached himself merging into the superstition of an imaginative brain wherein anything is possible.

He struck a match. Cradling it in his hands he watched

it flare up for a final look. In the sulphurous glow the bruise on the corpse looked uglier than before. But as he watched his jaw fell open, and he stared with congested eyes. The night air was not cold, yet he shivered. He saw that the lids of the dead woman had closed naturally!

"Valgame Dios!"

He tore at her hand, gripping it between trembling fingers. He felt fumblingly for her heart. His match burnt itself down to his fingers. When it went out he did not feel its scorching. There followed an interminable wait in the dark.

There was a slight movement in her, as though under the ice the thaw had set in. There seemed a special message for him in the life which answered his touch.

Don Pedro felt for his clasp-knife. Then as he waited for further signs the little runnel within ceased, and he knew that it was not necessary that he slit her throat—at least for the present. The heart's action, almost imperceptible at first, became weaker. He had nothing to fear. She would be dead before daylight. He was no longer her murderer. If it so happened she died, that was God's affair, not his.

He decided to return to the body in twenty-four hours, or sooner if he could do so without detection. There were difficulties ahead which would require the use of all his craftiness. If by any chance there was still life left in her upon his return she must be done to death. But he was enough of a craven not to wish to kill her twice. The corpse would then be buried, and whatever she possessed of value would be hidden in the ground in some spot easy of access to him. These articles could be retrieved after the señora's disappearance had ceased to agitate people, two years later, three or four . . . whichever was required.

So reasoning, Don Pedro's first anxieties over, he retraced his steps to the roadway and drove his asses back into the town. As he drew near the posada he sniffed the air. A rancid whiff of burnt cloth and leather, materials not intended to be fired, outraged his nostrils. The stench be-

came stronger as he reached his street. At his own door he gave the signal. It opened and he passed in, following his asses and the carreta.

In the middle of the patio were heaped a quantity of charred ends where a strong fire had been burning, and had transformed all the furnishings of number five into ashes.

"Have you burnt everything?"

"*Todo . . . todo*," was Concha's terse reply.

She led him once more upstairs. What had once been the chamber of death was now an empty room. Don Pedro's labours were not yet over. On the floor stood a broken cask filled with whitewash which Concepcione had slacked. A brush awaited his hand to blot out the last identification.

Three quarters of an hour later the fuchsia and love birds had given place to walls of grey-white blanks. A transversion had been accomplished which betrayed no secrets. Don Rodolfo, then roused, was established with his effects in the deserted room.

This done the *posadero* went below stairs. Ill accustomed to work, he undressed and threw himself upon a tumbled bed. When the dawn came over the housetops of Fuente la Higuera, fatigue and oppressed nerves had already decoyed him into heavy sleep.

XXI

HELENA felt her spirit toiling back to her body from illimitable space. Consciousness was withdrawing her thousand veils and through them sensation was attempting to penetrate.

She was aware only of exhaustion of mind and body. She lay without attempting to turn, regretful at waking. With her eyes closed she realised she was in the dark. Extending one hand she touched a wall of rock. Of a sudden her mental processes were shocked into instant reason. She opened her eyes but the unfathomable darkness did not give way.

She thought to rise. She told herself she should attempt some escape, but the clearness of her mind was already waning. Films of oblivion were shutting down upon her. . . . A velvet darkness that suffocated, had her by the throat and she was once more adrift. . . .

Miss Cass realised that it was hours later that her weakness passed. With a competency almost unimpaired her mind was able to explore her condition. An exhaustion that bound her hand and foot prohibited any movement. She was no longer in her room at the posada. She remembered Don Pedro's visit to her as something which had occurred æons before. He had robbed her and attempted to strangle her, but in the latter effort he had not been entirely successful. Where had he taken her? She thought of her mother. She had little hope that Mrs. Cass could find her.

She remembered that she had not written her letter to Jordan Buel. He had no means of knowing to what hill town she had betaken herself. Her mother had always remained uninformed as to his address, and he was the last person she would turn to for assistance. Mrs. Cass knew no Spanish, could not even make herself understood. Was

she to die then because the means of adequate search was denied her? She thought of Mr. Buel waiting in Paris after receiving her last letter. How long would he endure the suspense? He was not a patient man. She thanked God for that. But could she live until he went to Madrid and engaged detectives there to follow his unaccountable fiancée whose silence had suddenly become ominous.

Why shouldn't she cease writing? Might he not attribute it to reserve or a perversion of coquetry? Suppose he were to fancy she was deliberately annoying him and so remain in Paris until she saw fit to continue writing? Suppose he who was unimaginative should attach no further importance to her act than that she was traveling and hard pressed for time? Why not? What *could* happen to her? Was she not with her mother? What reason had he to be apprehensive?

Under the protection of rocks she turned and re-turned on her bed of straw, knowing there was scant chance of her recovery. She had been carried to that spot only to be out the way. She knew that just so long as she remained alive was she a menace to Don Pedro. She wondered if someone would return to transport her to some more distant hiding, or to have her put away and her body buried.

She attempted to rouse herself from the torpor which she recognised was germinating sleep or loss of consciousness. But the effort was too great. She was letting go, when suddenly her faculties sprang to instant life.

She heard a step on the loose flints near by. The shrubberies at the entrance were thrust aside. An adumbration poised a moment between her and the light. There was a pause. Then a scraping of a match upon the rock and Don Pedro was leaning over her.

Her closed eyes did not deceive him. Although the face was waxen in its pallor by match light, the lips were not discoloured. The nails of her hand which lay by her side had not paled. And as Don Pedro watched he detected her breathing.

Miss Cass knew by the oath which escaped his lips that

she was unsuccessful in her effort to counterfeit death. And with this discovery both body and brain were surrendered to terror. The pain at her throat where he had mishandled her now burned like a cautery. The very tissue of her felt loosened from the bone.

He had come back! She had known he would do this! But she had not expected him so soon! Perhaps he had been gone longer than she thought. Why hadn't he killed her outright? She made a monumental effort to hold her breath and failed.

He remained for a moment kneeling before her, the rock above not allowing him to stand. The quality of his language as he watched, was not reproduceable. Then he left abruptly.

She heard the brushwood torn aside. She opened her eyes in the dark. He had gone. But having found her alive, why had he left her? And then something of the malignancy of his plan suggested itself to her imagination.

She turned on her side, struggled to her knees and crawled toward the mouth of the cavern. She was forced to feel her way. Although her eyes were long accustomed to the dark, the overshelving rocks were low, almost to obscuring the entrance. Reaching the shrubberies she paused. There was no sound nearby. She parted them and looked out.

The hillside was saturated in moonlight. Above the sky quivered like a blue flame. The radiance thrown over the uneventful landscape before her was such that a small object was discernable, even at a distance. Miss Cass realised at once that all thought of escape was foredoomed to failure. And with this discovery she felt at once weaker. In her condition she could only drag herself a few feet. But the hillside provided no shelter. There were no folds in the slope where she could remain under cover. Nor was there oak or olive or *cortasco* which clothed the more precipitous inclines approaching Fuente la Higuera. For a distance on all sides stretched exposure, where she would perforce make a ready target for Don Pedro on his return.

She continued to look about her in despair. She knew the futility of any effort in attempting to thwart him in whatever his purposes. She forced herself through the shrubbery and managed to rise to her feet. As she did so her efforts sent a runnel of loosened stones careering down the hillside. She drew back, clinging to the rock in fright. The stones turned over and over and at length were caught below. She was paralysed by the sound. Her face in the moonlight was a mere wedge of white with distended eyes. With the last stone silenced she moved again, venturing a step or two from the rock entrance.

Some distance above lay the road. And from where Miss Cass stood she could hear the diminishing sound of wheels of Don Pedro's carreta being driven away. In that moment she apprehended his intentions. He did not wish to leave the carreta in plain view near the point of the murder on the contingency of passers-by. Even at that hour it was conceivable that a chance *arriero* or travelling merchant might be approaching the town. Wishing a lift what more likely than that he should attempt to find the driver, and so discover Don Pedro in the rocks and become informed of his business there.

He lighted his cigarette and drove half a kilometre up the road. Don Pedro walked behind the leisurely moving animals, prodding them from time to time in the rump with his stick. Reaching a sharp turn in the road he drove them down the embankment into a small and mutilated wood of cork and *azinneiras* trees. In the moonlight the shadows of these almost verdureless branches offered scant protection against an alert eye. However, it was the best shelter that the roadway offered. And the work which lay before him was not one which would require a great length of time.

Killing the Señorita Inglesa was not altogether a man's job, since she was now like a lifeless bird and already in his hand. The real problem was to bury her, but for this he had come prepared. He removed a heavy spade from the carreta, obliterated all mark of the wheels for some

distance back and then went on his way. He took the precaution to walk on the grass, dry and close-cropped from incessant grazing.

When he reached the cave he decided to light a candle. The young woman was unarmed and even though conscious was no match for him. He would place one hand over her mouth and with his *navaja* make a swift gash in her throat. He would tie her arms together and her limbs and drag her to the entrance. Then he would dig a shallow grave and place her in it beneath the rocks where he could roll one of those above over the spot so that the scar in the hillside would remain concealed.

As he reached the place he climbed down the rock. His movements were agile though unhurried. He drew aside the brushwood and inserted himself within the low opening. Don Pedro's body was as supple as a ribbon. There he lighted his candle, unsheathed his *navaja* and looked about him.

His surprise was so great at finding the cavern uninhabited that at first he thought a miracle had been compassed. Then his more practical judgment abjured any such belief. She had escaped. In that case she could not be far away. She had had no water since he had brought her there and was still very weak. Don Pedro darted out into the moonlight and stood scanning the hillside. He saw a shadow not far off as if something crouching on the ground. With a stiff smile curving his lips he made toward it.

Miss Cass had realised that any effort at escape must be put into immediate execution. And so upon emerging from the cave she had set off down the hillside. Her progress was slow. She felt that whatever chance she had depended upon her keeping the contagion of fear in her brain from spreading to her limbs. But fear had crippled her until her knees were unable to answer her commands. She staggered as though on wooden legs. She was like some drunken thing set in motion and now moving from its own momentum. She knew it was weakness more than fright.

And without knowing it she prayed that her strength would not desert her until she made cover.

The spot was still a long distance off, and even when reached would offer only temporary safety. It consisted of a group of thistles, so sparsely grown that one could see between them, but which, nevertheless, cast a lean shadow. Once or twice she stopped long enough to look back. Don Pedro had not returned. He had remained away a longer period than she had expected. And yet it seemed to her only a matter of seconds since the distance which separated her from the rocks was still considerable.

And then quite suddenly a curtain of black came before her. She knew that weakness had conquered. She sank to the ground. She could no longer see a foot before her. She attempted to crawl away on her knees but the effort was too great. She was aware of a whirling darkness behind her eyes. She could see a mad circling of motes, glittering like powdered steel. Then she was sunk in a warm hush.

After a moment the wave of weakness passed. But the return came too late. She remembered where she was, her plight and, turning, looked back.

Don Pedro was making his way nimbly over the face of the rocks and disappeared through the opening. Intent upon his business he had not seen her. Yet she remained in complete view. In an instant he would be out of the cove, would discover her and be in full pursuit. She staggered to her feet. There was no use to look back now. She must run even though he saw her. Even though he overtook her she would still be running when felled to the ground.

Her breath was sobbing. She was conscious of a functioning hitherto unknown. Something rose and fell. As it rose it seemed her heart turned over within her. And as it fell a gag was removed from her throat.

The thistles were now close at hand. If she could only reach them in safety. Two or three steps more. . . . She threw herself down upon the ground in their shadow. Be-

tween their stems she had a view of the distance just traversed.

Don Pedro was standing in front of the rock entrance. He was facing her. She wondered how long he had been there. Had he seen her run to cover? She was not left long in doubt. Still carrying the prod with which he urged on his animals he came toward her moving with speed.

Two rocks lay in his path. In the past they had been used by the gipsies to build a fire between them. The interspace was insufficient for a person to crawl into, but Don Pedro stopped to prod this shadow, then came on.

The suspense she was suffering was intolerable. She thought for a moment to pull herself up and face him. Instant death was preferable to this waiting for an end which at best could be equivocated only a minute or more. And then it occurred to her it might not be immediate death. There might be carnal requirements wrung from her first, and she remained where she was lying flat upon the grass, attempting to efface herself still further. Her heart seemed to be under the ground, beating up against her body. The thud of it she felt was enough to shatter the universe. Her face was concealed, her features pressed into the dust. Each breath drew the odor of dried earth into her nostrils.

She waited. She could see nothing. But she heard his step draw closer.

Within her thoughts were clamouring. Her brain sheltered incoherent sound like a shell. . . . Would her remains ever be found? Would the truth come to light? A puerile fear of revealed religion invaded her. Was *this* the eternal reckoning?

The footsteps had stopped. He was standing over her now. How long must she retain that position while he amused himself at her expense? Why did he not bury his knife between her shoulders?

She dared not look up. Seconds passed. Her most poignant feeling became one of exhaustion. A red ant crawled on her face but she did not brush it off. She must move! . . . She decided to count a hundred first. . . .

Gradually she lifted her head.

She was alone. She looked about her. Don Pedro was nowhere in sight. She had compressed herself into incredibly small space. He had drawn near, concluded she could not be there, and continued his search in another direction. But not knowing where he had gone she felt afraid to make good her escape.

At length she concluded he had crossed the road above, or else gone toward the cork wood which she could see far away to her left. This decided her to continue down the incline although she knew there was the chance that she might be following him whichever direction she pursued. She continued slowly, step by step, each moment her amazement increasing at her miraculous release. The hillside became more oblique. Below she sighted a road.

She made toward it now, hurrying as best she could. Nettles tore at her clothes and twice she fell. She rose shaken and cut, but at such times her only thought was of the noise. Any injury she might do herself was unconsidered. Reaching the embankment which ran along the side of the road, she hesitated. There were no shadows in which it seemed credible anyone could be hiding. Below her was a ditch which followed the road, intended to carry water but now covered with hardened mud and broken with gaping fissures. Miss Cass lowered herself into the ditch and then was at a loss to know what movement to make next. It was a game of chess, only the pawn was life. She wondered where the road led. There was no sign of any hamlet or lights as far as she could see. Could it be that this was only a lower loop of the upper road by which Don Pedro had travelled.

She was afraid to continue along it in either direction. Don Pedro would extend his desperate search. Finding that she was not above he would make his way to this lower level. According to which reasoning there seemed less peril in remaining where she was. She had little idea of time. She looked up at the disk of the moon, seemingly immovable and the colour of honey. She calculated there

were yet three hours before it set. Three hours of undiminished light.

She seated herself on the edge of the ditch, at first cowering. And then as time passed her fears diminished somewhat and she relaxed, leaning against the embankment behind her.

Not far away she could hear the chirp of a solitary cricket. She was caught in a surge of recollections by the familiar sound. She remembered the cricket orchestra which she, with other undergraduates, had often heard on summer evenings in Poughkeepsie within the grounds of Vassar. And she was the same girl now waiting for her encounter, on a deserted country road in the Sierra Morena. The hiatus that separated her from past days could never be bridged.

A half hour passed. . . .

And then suddenly she was aware of sound. At first unable to analyse it she thought the ringing was in her ears. And then she knew it was the jingle of bells down the road. It was still at a distance. She crouched in the shadow and waited. It was rapidly approaching like a single motive of some great orchestration.

Then a turn in the road revealed a pair of mules with collars of bells. They were harnessed to a cart with a canvas covering, the whole enveloped in a moving cloud of dust. A quantity of impulses tore at her for domination. She thought to declare herself and ask to be taken to the nearest town. And then she knew the danger of her appeal. She was in that part of Sierra Morena where the traffic of the *bandolero* received its yearly toll, and she felt an instant reaction of all thought except an overwhelming influx of fear.

The sound of the bells became louder. Veils of dust approached her in which she was shrouded. The mules were abreast of her, passing, when a sudden inextinguishable hope of escape assailed her. As the cart swept by she sprang into the road. The dust was strangling. The mules' pace now even, but her determination was not easily thwarted.

Whatever the risk, if she failed now she was without hope. She managed to grip hold of the end of the cart. She attempted to pull herself up onto it. She lost her footing. But she did not let go, and then slowly, painfully, drew herself up.

They were going faster now. She sat panting under the canvas covering. The *carretero*, with his face muffled in his shawl, was all unmindful of his fellow traveller. But the interior of the cart held another occupant. On the husks which covered it lay a heifer roped to the side.

She crawled in further, covering herself as best she could with husks. Then she lay down. The bad going made itself felt in a violent pitching, but she lay silent with open eyes as they continued their rapid descent.

XXII

SEFTON remained silent for several minutes after Don Rodolfo ceased talking. He had been busily putting together those portions of the fellow's story which he believed and supplementing them by what his own sense of reality projected. Any inaccuracies of hypothesis meant the loss of this one chance of finding her, and accordingly he worried that every premise remained reasonable.

Without the *cantino* the dusk approached. Before the windows the ghostly eucalyptus continued its unbroken whispering, turning its leaves, now grey, now mauve, now vivid green. Within the room the cloth on the table before them was crumpled, spread with particles of bread and spotted with wine where Don Rodolfo's hand shook in making the journey to his lips. His lids drooped heavily. Even that portion of his brown body showing through his rent shirt was distended. A complete satiety had descended upon him in which his words lost much of their fire and his mind its alertness. He continued sensuously to smoke, his eyes glittering occasionally as they unsealed themselves through a haze of cigarette fumes.

"How do you know the Señorita entered the wagon?" Sefton asked abruptly.

Don Rodolfo looked at him with reproach.

"My brother, have I not thought of her disappearance a thousand times myself! Mary most pure! The young woman could not have hidden in a rat-hole, could she? There was no hut, no place where she could seek shelter. Don Pedro searched the rest of the night . . . and I most of the next day."

"And you never found any trace of her?"

Don Rodolfo shook his head. His eyes blazed momentarily in emphatic denial.

"None."

"What is your explanation of what happened to her? Do you think she is alive now?"

"I have often asked myself that same question, Señor. God of my soul, where can she be? It is three years . . . and still no one knows."

That the man could be of no further use that day was apparent. Unaccustomed food and wine had blanketed his entire being in material comfort, from which he was not to be routed by another's mental distress. His eyes were closing in a stupor of wine. Nothing but Sefton's placing his hand in his pocketbook could recall them to their surroundings. This he did, paid the fellow the sum agreed to, and replied to his courtly "Adios." With the Spaniard gone he remained for some time sunk in his entangled thoughts. Later his host entered bearing a petroleum lamp to ask if he would require anything more and he paid his bill and left.

Next day he sought out Don Rodolfo once more. He had slept for hours after his invigorating food; had bathed, shaved, and was wearing fresh linen, a new coat and *gorrita*. He looked amazingly younger and less sinister. He saluted the American with his usual imperturbability, and to all questions was not to be dissuaded from the story of the day before. His account was so metriculously worded, so artful a compound of desire to assist Sefton and injure his co-conspirator, that Sefton at length gave up all thought of upsetting it.

This decision made, he set out on a journey of several weeks, that carried him through most of the nearby villages he had already visited, where he had inquired if anyone had seen the *Señorita Inglesa* . . . a beautiful young woman, with fair skin and dark hair, and eyes unlike those of a Spaniard, who had been missing for three years. . . . In the market-place the townsmen gathered about him and the housewives, with live chickens under their arms, listened to his questions. No one had seen her.

He traveled slowly, remaining long enough at each stop

to gain the confidence of *cura* and *alcalde* of the village, hoping with the church and law upon his side the silence and superstition of its people might be lifted. One night, arriving late at a town several kilometres distant, he made his wants known at the small *casa de huéspedes*, which was the only inn the town possessed.

He was met at the door by the rubicund proprietor, a bright-eyed man, prosperous looking, a well-developed paunch nicely fitted into his *traje de fiesta* and a heavy silver watch-chain drawn tight across his convexity. Grasping Sefton's hand, he announced his opportune arrival, since his daughter had just that moment been married and they were even then waiting to be seated at table. Sefton refused courteously to join the ceremony, and after dining alone was shown upstairs to the proprietor's own room, there being no other available. He lay in bed, unable to sleep, while the dancing and merrymaking continued downstairs, turning a thought over and over in his mind—a thought aroused by a chance remark of the inn-keeper. Had Miss Cass sought safety in a convent? His host had explained that the lights he had noticed on the hilltop on his approach to the village were those of a strict and cloistered order of nuns. But Helena would not have maintained continued seclusion, his common sense assured him, and even had she thought to do so the American detectives had not overlooked religious orders.

The dancing kept up all night, the music of guitars plucking fresh dissonances, strange Moorish lilts in minors that stirred the blood. There were shouts of approval and hand-clapping as an accompaniment to the castanets, as young men and women spun around, while inequalities of the floor quivered to the contact and the stamp of their heels. There was light in the sky before their enthusiasm was extinguished.

As he lay open-eyed in the inn-keeper's room he realised he could not enter the convent or speak with the sisters. He learnt next day that the order was a strict one, given to contemplation and fasts. But, not being a detective with

a warrant from the *comisario de policia*, nor a dignity of the Church, he could not obtain admission. During the afternoon he thought to ask the inn-keeper if there was any man connected with the order. He learned to his great interest that they employed a gardener who did the heavy labour, a simple-witted fellow, who lived in a hut at the edge of the garden, preparing his own meals, but coming to the village once a month to make purchases for the community. It was agreed that upon the fellow's next trip Sefton should be summoned.

It was ten days later that this opportunity offered. Sefton did not see the man at first, when his attention was called to him in crossing the *paseo* on which the *fonda* gave. The man matched the hillside as completely as a grasshopper. He was wearing the sandals sometimes seen on the agriculturalists and swine-herds of the country, and clothes that had lost all distinguishing colour in perpetual exposure, with a drab *manta* thrown over one shoulder. He had brought to the village those commodities which the convent yielded and had made such exchanges as were required, had stored his provisions in the small *taranta* with which he would return up the hill at sundown.

The inn-keeper called to him with his unfailing geniality, but, receiving no answer, placed his hand heavily on the man's shoulder as he passed. Summoning him peremptorily to a grape-arbour at the rear of the *fonda*, the poor creature followed obediently, as though accustomed to have his own inclinations overruled. Here, as they seated themselves before the table, Sefton, at a sign from his host, ordered wine to loosen the mute tongue of their victim. After he had tasted his glass of home-brewed wine, Sefton asked his first question:

Had he seen a foreign girl . . . at the convent . . . three years ago.

The man gave immediate denial. But the innkeeper urged patience, as he moved with disrelish at this form of witless amusement. After the second glass Sefton repeated his question, and this time obtained no answer at all. His

good-natured host smiled encouragingly. What cloistral information could be extracted from a man who scarcely knew his own name, who obeyed only certain routine directions, as a dog will his master?

The rustic scrutinised him for a moment, a functionless brain watching him out of dark-umber eyes, so shallow that Sefton's thoughts struck bottom in them. He felt a moment's irritation that his hopes had been allowed to build on the information of this clod. But, after several deliberative moments, the simple creature scratched his head, and, putting all perplexities aside, began to talk. Much that he said was unintelligible to the novelist. Having spoken little in years the timbre of his voice had changed like that of a deaf person. And a partial vacuity seemed to have accomplished what his hermit life had left undone.

The man was obviously old, in spite of a child-like expression, with a tanned, beardless face, not unlike an old woman's. Many of his words were unknown except to the native, but out of what the dull-witted fellow told there grew a revelation which held his listener breathless.

XXIII

MISS CASS was at the mercy of a man whom she had not seen, but nothing which lay before her could equal the horror from which she had escaped. The canvas hood covering the top of the cart was drawn down between her and the *carretero*. She could only judge the temper of the man by the continuous *anda, anda, andoah* with which he urged on his mules to greater speed.

Once, hearing something moving at her side, she put out her hand and the heifer plaintively licked her fingers with its rough tongue. She derived a curious comfort from the caress and animal warmth. Her greatest need was for water. Her lips were parched from the want of it, her throat suffocated. This desire became the one thought which agitated her, beyond which her mind was lulled into total inefficacy.

Through the night she lay, scarcely moving, her eyes watching the round opening in the canvas at the rear of the jolting cart. She could see a circle of rocking skies, where the constellations burned and then were shaken out of sight by a turn in the road. The immensities of space between them oppressed her. The indigo vault against which they were displayed grew fainter. A mist of star dust came between her and the heavens.

Miss Cass did not know if she had been asleep or if exhaustion drumming in her ears had claimed her to the exclusion of all surface consciousness. Her lids fell wide apart. She was still in the cart, but through the opening in the canvas she saw the stars had gone and without was darkness. And then she realised they were no longer in motion. They had stopped on the roadside. There was no sign of any village discoverable out of the uniform gloom.

This was as good an opportunity as any that was likely to arise for her to leave the cart. She rose to her knees throwing off the husks. Any movement was now audible in the surrounding stillness. At that moment the *carretero*, who had already seen to his mules, came to the opening in the canvas and stood there holding an earthen jar filled with water. Miss Cass cowered where she was. She saw only a muffled silhouette that extended the jar to the heifer, roped by her side. The animal struggled to its knees and sucked audibly while switching its tail. When the *carretero* decided roughly that it had had enough he removed the jar, climbed back to his seat and with a shrilling *asta, asta mula*, they were off.

In the darkness through which they were now whirling she noticed the *carretero's* blows became more frequent. He exhorted the sluggish mules with an explosive vocabulary to speed, but all his eloquence was failing of effect. She calculated roughly that she had travelled over four hours and in case she had slept perhaps longer. In less than an hour it would be light. She would leave the cart before then, depending on a moment when exhaustion had farther diminished the animals' gait.

And so half an hour later she sat on the edge of the cart waiting for the propitious moment in which to swing herself off. She decided she was miles from any habitation. The country composed of steep hills and an occasional *vega* was not unfriendly. At length they came in sight of fields of stubble where the grain had been harvested and she knew she was near a hamlet. The mules' pace was now slow. She lowered her feet gradually to the road, ran along with the cart for a few paces and then let go.

She was free. But with a freedom which she had not the strength to put to any purpose. On her left the road fell away to a depth in which the light was insufficient to explore. On her right rose an embankment above which she could see fields of hay cultivated on a hillside. She climbed the embankment and, finding a hayrick, made her

way toward it. Here she arranged a luxurious bed, sheltered from the east, and lay there in a semi-somnolence, never completely oblivious to her surroundings, nor yet thoroughly wakeful.

Struggling through the torpor came a succession of lance-like pains, the demands of her body for food and refreshment. She opened her eyes and saw the sun wheeling overhead. It was drawing the heat from the bleaching fields. And the fragrance of cut hay, which at another time would have delighted her, now overpowered. Its sweetness was choking. The breaths she drew savoured of scents that nauseated in her weakness.

Later in the day she became aware of sounds on the other side of the hayrick. At first she thought it was a human being moving near at hand, and then as she listened acutely she heard the periodical pulling at the loosened hay and knew it was an animal. She crept forward several feet until she sighted a goat with black and white pelt, feeding at its leisure. At a distance she could see the rest of the herd from which this one had strayed. As she watched the animal turned, stood motionless without revolving its mouthful, watching her with lambent yellow eyes. She spoke to it gently but it did not move. Then concluding she was harmless it continued its cropping.

Miss Cass had noticed its swollen udder, and a feeling of desperation told her this might be her only opportunity of nourishment. She crept toward it on her knees until she could stroke its hide. The goat shook its head as though ill-accustomed to such effeminacies and she placed her hands inexpertly against the teats. Very gently she pressed them. A needle of milk shivered out. She repeated this process with indifferent success, the goat seemingly surveying her efforts with a mixture of patience and disgust. Then she lowered her head under its body and rained flashes of milk into her parched throat. The udder was still far from depleted when the goat, tiring of her efforts, made off and rejoined the herd.

She watched them from where she lay. Somewhere over

the hill, she knew, must be the hut of a peasant farmer. Darkness she realised would be upon her within a couple of hours. Therefore, if she were to reach shelter before nightfall, she could not postpone her attempt any longer. And so she set out, moving only a short distance at a time, and then sinking down to rest until her heart quieted itself and the glowing penumbra which came between her and the light vaporised and was gone.

The sun had set and dusk was proceeding out of the folds of the surrounding country to meet the darkness in the sky when Miss Cass reached the crest of the hill. Below her stretched a small, deserted *vega* and at its extremity rose another hill. While she remained irresolute what to do she saw the goat herder with his herd. She thought to cry out and gain his attention. Country people who lived near to the soil were always good-hearted, she reminded herself, with reviving faith in mankind. Any possible distrust which she might have felt in him was lessened as she saw him reach the summit of the hill beyond. In a moment he would disappear and she would be alone.

She attempted to call but the muscles of her throat contracted. She could not liberate her voice. It was imprisoned deep down within her. After prodigious striving she raised a cry, but the result was a mere thread of sound. Her eyes never left the herder, but he continued on his way. She waved a small square of lawn above her head and called several times. But he did not turn and a moment later had begun the descent and was lost to view.

There was now no choice but for her to explore the *vega*. She continued until the darkness made further progress impossible. In the tangle of brushwood she prepared herself a rough bed and lay down. At first the intense discomfort withheld all thought of sleep, then a distorted fear, and then hunger. But at length exhaustion overcame them all and she was lost. She awakened twice during the night startled by noises near at hand which proved to be the sound of prowling nature. She lay without moving, looking up at the stars. For moments she wondered if her fear was

of mankind or the supernatural. She seemed utterly alone and yet face to face with God. No matter how she cowered it seemed to her she was visible. The aloneness beneath those immensities was crushing.

Later when she awakened coldness was the only sensation. She felt chilled to the bone, her muscles stiff, her hair wet. Her head ached and she was too weak to rouse herself to her misery.

She opened her eyes. It was early morning and she was lying on a hillside grown with furze, wild fennel and brushwood. As she raised herself on her elbow she could see no sign of human habitation. She could hear small startled sounds in the fennel about her, and diminutive scamperings which she supposed were field mice. Her hands were soiled with broken nails; her clothes smeared with moisture and filth. The hazards of past hours devoured her to the exclusion of her present needs. She lay still for some time and then realising that she could not remain where she was, she exerted her will to rise. As she did so she noticed beyond the wilderness of brushwood which separated her, the profile of a building at a great height which stood against the morning sky. It was built of stone and of considerable size though dwarfed by distance and weathered until it had lost its salient colours except for a tiled roof and long green shutters. The building was surrounded by a high wall on two sides, its own outer wall forming a part of the enclosure on the third. She could see that a road, rough, little used with deep ruts cut in the hillside, made its way there. Miss Cass decided after a moment of indecision to attempt to gain its refuge. She was aware of a warning of incipient illness, nauseous, insistent, which called for immediate rest.

It was a labourious ascent, and several times she wavered in her purpose and sat down, doubting if her strength would hold out. The building rose above chestnuts, oaks and plane trees, and the surrounding country possessed none of the more haggard aspects which she associated with the Spanish *compaña*. Her brain clamouring to know where

she was, wondered if she had been transported a great distance. Below her ran the road by which she had travelled, although in which direction she was she could not surmise. Then she rose once more.

She knew she had done well in selecting this building in the hope of relief, instead of trusting to the charity of any chance traveller on the highroad. As she drew nearer she noted its cleanliness and order. The green door and scoured stone step before it; where there was cleanliness, she argued, there was intelligence, and intelligence and kindness she believed were never far apart. She swayed, gripped hold of a young sapling whilst the hillside moved in strange convolutions and she could find no stationary ground on which to place her foot. Her vexation increased at what she knew to be only weakness. She waited for it to pass and then proceeded.

The wall of the building was pierced by several windows looking toward the East, but most of them, she surmised, gave upon a garden. The tops of orange and citron trees rose above the wall and she had a glimpse of grape vines and creepers trained on *parras* and a cultivation of wall-fruit.

A feeling of excitement now mastered her. She recognised that only a few minutes of consciousness were left. No one had watched her toiling progress up to these heights to whom she could now signal in distress. There was probable help if she could reach the green door before being overcome. The struggle brought a cold sweat to her brow. Her breathing was animal; respiratory poundings were suffocating. The green door had seemed very near for almost five minutes and still it eluded her.

Waves of faintness broke against Miss Cass. Her nails were dug into the palms of her grimy hands. She sank to her knees crawling the last steps. The door was before her. She remained a tumbled heap, waiting for reviving strength so that she might reach the bell. It was her last struggle. As though in answer to a prayer her hand caught it, pulled vigorously and then let go.

XXIV

THERE were moments of awful doubt before Helena heard steps. Then the green door was unbolted, a key thrust into the lock, and it opened.

The portress of the convent, a large, shapeless woman, middle-aged, with weak eyes which squinted through steel spectacles, stood on the lintel regarding Miss Cass with amazement.

"As you love God," Helena said, "have mercy on me."

But the words were spoken in English, and her mind, lost in enveloping faintness, was unable to prompt any words the portress could understand. She had made her struggle, but further lucidity was denied her, and, as she faced the spectacled eyes, her effort to recall some word of Spanish that would explain her predicament was defeated. Her knees went out from under her and she slipped at the portress's feet, like a bundle of old clothes, into a profound unconsciousness. The stranger was carried to the infirmary, and placed under the care of the infirmarian, a sister not totally without experience.

The infirmary was a large hexagonal room with five long windows giving onto the well-ordered convent garden. On her pallet-bed the distressed young woman lay, watched alternately by the superior of the convent, the novice mistress and the infirmarian. The portress was instructed to give no information concerning the stranger to the other sisters, for the prioress, who was herself stern, incurious and inflexible, did not wish that any good act within the order should be turned to speculation and curiosity.

But although each of the three inspected the patient, who watched them with open, staring eyes, Miss Cass knew them not, and her speech was always in a foreign tongue. The infirmarian, Sister Celestina, moved about her bed in felt

slippers, and, although a large and powerfully built woman, her step was silence itself. The windows were kept open that the thyme-scented air might cool the feverish face.

After several days had passed and the patient's temperature remained high, Sister Celestina suggested that medical aid be called, but the prioress, after another examination, concluded this unnecessary. That the young woman was very ill she saw, but she believed in her recovery and ordered that prayers be said in her behalf.

Miss Cass, hanging between life and death, cried aloud wildly that she was being pursued, torn from her room and was to be buried alive. During the hour of meditation her voice rang out, convulsed, strangled, a cry of such chilling terror that the good sisters shivered at prayer.

"Don't let him bury me! Don't let him bury me!" she cried. "I'm alive! I'm still alive."

She would grasp Sister Celestina's arm with force and try to be lifted from her bed which she fancied was her grave closing in on her. And then worn down to exhaustion the fluttering heart would quiet itself and she would slip once more into oblivion.

Later she would be roused to speak quietly.

"I know it's wrong," she would say, "but my secret will be safe when the train has passed over me. I'll be safe with God." And she would smile.

"Let no one fear God who does not fear the world."

And there were long conversations in which Sister Celestina was called "Jordan." At such times she told him that she loved him but begged him to go away. And at others, she would declare that she would endure it. With a brow beaded with sweat and fever-dilated eyes, she would sit up in bed and defy the crowd to stone her to death and her father to deny her his house. . . .

The basin of soup that was brought to her she drank greedily. And following her violence came days of coma in which Sister Celestina became more apprehensive. But at length the fever lifted and for weeks her time was devoted to long restful hours of sleep, after which she wak-

ened to a benumbed condition which was not yet consciousness, but its borderland.

At such times Sister Celestina sat by the bedside busy with her lace-making when her strong lean fingers were not feeling the polished wooden beads and silver cross of her rosary. The convent had many years before sheltered a prioress who had entertained a vision, and this saint had lived in a part of the convent most of which had been restored, and from which new wings had been thrown out. The old rooms, however, had been retained where possible and were known as the Santa Casa; the infirmary was a new wing which abutted them and had little connection with the rest of the building.

It was the day of the Ascension and the mass for its celebrating was being said in the chapel. Sister Celestina was occupied at her devotions alone with her patient when Miss Cass moved suddenly and sat up in bed.

"Where am I?" she asked in Spanish.

"This is the Order of the Sisters of the Adoration."*

Miss Cass remained silent a moment, attempting to piece together a number of divergent recollections. Then she exclaimed:

"I was able to reach the bell?"

"Yes."

"And the green door was opened?"

"Yes, and you were carried in here."

"Who are you?"

"I am Sister Celestina, the infirmarian. I don't think you had better ask any more questions."

"But I must. How long have I been here?"

"Several weeks."

"But why have the leaves all fallen in the garden?"

"This is winter."

"Winter!"

Helena pronounced the word blankly, without meaning. Sister Celestina returned to the bedside with a fresh

*The writer substitutes "The Sisters of the Adoration in place of the correct name of this order.

bowl of soup and insisted upon feeding her. Each time her lips formed a question a spoonful of hot soup silenced them and the determined sister signalled an intention to ignore further colloquy.

A thought cataclysmal in its results had formed in her brain while the placid sister continued to press spoonfuls of hot liquid upon her. She swallowed them merely because it was simpler than arguing that she did not want it.

"May I see a mirror?" she at length requested.

"There are none here."

"No mirrors?"

"No."

"But one's hair?"

"That's very simply cared for," the sister said with a happy smile, as though it were the greatest joke in the world. "And the scapular covers it."

"You haven't cut mine off?"

Helena's hands flew to her head in terror and she grasped her thick coil with reassurance. She had considered her heavy black hair her one claim to beauty.

"Do I look very badly, Sister Celestina? Be honest, tell me just how I look."

"You're very pale."

"But am I a fright?"

"You have been ill. That anyone can see. But you will have a complete recovery."

"I'm a fright. I knew it."

She turned her head petulantly toward the wall and the thought of her recovery no longer filled her with hope. She longed to see Jordan and yet, great as she felt her need for him, she could not risk seeing the expression of his eyes change and be aware of his discomposure. He was a man and the masculine mind would not be expected to penetrate far below the envelope. It would be useless, she felt, to affirm that she was the same person he had loved if her identity had forsaken the rounded cheek and clear eye. And if Jordan ceased to love her, what then?

There was only one person in the world whose affection

would never waver, with whom there could be no breach. She would wire for her mother first and later, when she felt equal to making the effort, she would send for Mr. Buel and see if her ill-conditioned appearance was sufficient to alienate his love. But for the present she had not the strength and inclination to face the ordeal. Much as she loved him she was afraid. Life lay before her and she must play her cards wisely.

She was lying with the sheet and coverlet drawn up to her chin when she shuddered as the shock of her condition smote her. Her secret was apparent now, she realised, as she lay with terror-stricken eyes and parted lips.

Here in the orderly life of the convent the good sister who succoured her knew. The prioress knew. Her criminality was exposed to the casual eye. During the months of her illness the dread had convicted her, and now she was a creature of contamination, retained, cared for as a proof of Christian piety. She closed her eyes to shut out the disfigurement of her approaching motherhood. She lay silent, thinking. This last discovery was her undoing. And she had thought the moment before of the comfort which her mother could extend. She was denied that. She must remain there alone, in hiding, a pariah alike to these holy women within and to the secular mind without.

Her brain travelled wearily back over the horror of the days when she had her first intimation in Madrid. Even while she carried the hidden dread with her day and night, she knew it was without substance. Then gradually had come the awful confirmation, even while she attempted to deny to herself the evidence which was already corroborated. Those weeks resolved themselves into a long nightmare of heat, dust and unrelieved movement. They were vivid and yet unreal, like the suffering of a patient undergoing ether. She remembered her mother's insistent desire to visit galleries and dissect Goyas. But art had no meaning to her then. Of the crowds they passed and repassed in the Parque de Madrid, when as occasionally she saw a woman facing her parenthood walking slowly between rela-

standing the bad going, Mr. Buel drove his car as usual to Bayonne.

"Why not go to Biarritz?" he suggested to Helena. "This will be your one opportunity of seeing the town without being seen yourself. Everyone is within doors. The country roads are out of the question to-day. We'll only be gone half an hour and I will show you what the storm has done to the beach and the bathing pavilion."

Miss Cass, who had at first refused, at length relented. With her newly found circumspection she drew down a motoring veil before he handed her into the car. They sped over dark shining pavements, under a continuous rush of water. Everywhere were broken trees, shattered glass and loosened tiles. The demoralisation of the storm was evident on all sides.

As they turned from the Rue de France into the Avenue du Palais Miss Cass noticed that the streets were deserted except of their native element, the guests of the hotels not venturing out into the water but remaining spectators from enclosed verandahs. Mr. Buel drove the car in the direction of the lighthouse. And then halted it on a deserted stretch where their view of the ocean was uninterrupted.

Miss Cass exclaimed as she saw the pitch of the beach which sloped down to the blackened waves each onslaught carrying away more of the sand. Far out the ocean was pluming itself like a mating bird. The roar was intense. The tide boomed over the rocks beyond, sending up geysers of spray. The water looked curiously solid like fields of green and black marble that was being shattered to atoms by intense explosions from beneath. Mr. Buel watched Helena as she sat beside him, her veil lifted, her attention never once diverted from the tumult before them.

"Watch this one," she said, gripping his arm.

A monumental comber detached itself from its fellows, rearing to an even greater height with a suction that drew up sand, discolouring it to an angry black.

Buel ran the car to the lighthouse and returned, stopping

once more for a last look. They were still watching engrossed when Helena exclaimed with horror:

"Look. . . . It's a human being."

They were silent, intent. On the crest of a wave they could see something dark, moving. As the wave broke falling prone on the beach, they saw long streamers of dishevelled seaweed writhing.

Miss Cass laughed.

"It was terribly realistic for a moment. It looked like loosened hair."

In their absorption they had not noticed the approach of an open car driven by a man who glanced at them with interest as he passed. The water beneath his wheels splashed their car in fan-like formation.

Miss Cass's face underwent a change.

"I know that man," she said bluntly.

"The man who just passed?"

"Yes. I can't recall his name. I don't suppose he really saw me. He's a Frenchman, who was attached to the embassy at Washington. Can you see by the mirror on the car if he is looking this way?"

Mr. Buel slipped down in his seat and looked in the mirror.

"Yes. He's turning back."

"Then drive on."

The car sprang forward.

"Not too fast," Miss Cass cautioned. "It will look suspicious. What is he doing now?"

"He's turning his car."

"Then he recognised me. He's going to follow."

"What does he want?"

"The reward, of course. He wants to make sure, and then there's the adventure, the experience, the publicity. . . ."

Buel cursed.

"Not so fast," Helena repeated. "You can't possibly get me back to Bayonne without his seeing where I live. Then everything will be up."

"I should suppose you'd hate me. You've taken it wonderfully."

"No, I haven't. But the one thing I am utterly ashamed of now is my weakness in not daring to stand by my act. That feeling is over. I don't know if this is inherent strength or merely nature's obligation, but I love and am going to fight for my motherhood."

"Sweetheart, you're too glorious for me."

Mr. Buel was piqued that the young woman beside him, whom he had once held in his arms, should now seem remote, unreal. She had not once asked him a question or named marriage as an eventuality.

He told her that he wished to marry at once, although he realised marriage in France was complicated, public and required time. He had suggested running to England but Mrs. Cass wished her daughter to have two or three weeks' rest before making the trip. By that time, if sufficiently mended, they were to go to some corner of Northumberland or Scotland for the ceremony. After which they would remain in some outskirt of Torquay for the birth. In the meantime Mrs. Cass and Roscoe would return home, admit Miss Cass was found and was on her wedding trip along the Riviera. Two years later they would turn up in New York, merely claiming the child was six months younger than he was.

"What do you think of the plan?"

"I am willing to do anything so he won't suffer through me." Then she added, plaintively: "I don't know why I persist in saying 'he.'"

"I do," Mr. Buel answered boisterously.

His arms were around her and Helena melted into his embrace. It was a moment of transfusion of something closer than ideas. For in his embrace all the smaller feelings of resentment, uncertainty, feeble flashes of irony, were stilled by the strange elation that claimed her once more his own, with the same definiteness as in the early days. His lips had a power of reuniting which his words failed to ratify.

Biarritz proved over populous with English and American visitors, thus rendering Miss Cass's security doubtful. Accordingly she and her mother were lodged at Bayonne, three miles distant, in pleasant though modest quarters in a quaint old hotel in the Rue Thiers. They had their meals served in their common sitting-room and on the registry were disguised as Mrs. Dion Tilden and her daughter, Mrs. Palmer of London.

For the first time Miss Cass realised what strict precautions must be taken to withhold her identity, as she was allowed to hear the extent to which her disappearance had been proclaimed. Buel and Roscoe, living openly at the Palais under their own names, made the trip once a day to Bayonne from Biarritz in Buel's car. On the outskirts of the town Mrs. Cass and her daughter met them and Roscoe yielded his place to Helena. At an appointed hour the four returned, Miss Cass and her mother going back to the Rue Thiers and Jordan Buel, with Roscoe beside him, drove his car along the Grand Plage to the Hotel du Palais.

Buel, who knew Biarritz from previous visits, was familiar with the country for miles and their trips through outlying villages and long agricultural stretches were a delight to Helena. One afternoon at dusk they visited the race course at La Barre, and another day they attempted San Sebastian, but turned back, as she found the sun too tiring after they had crossed the Spanish frontier. In this way the two weeks passed swiftly, and Helena Cass gained under the healing influence of hours spent out of doors and plans for a contented future.

It was on an evening following Mrs. Cass's decision to remain a third week that a severe storm swept the coast. The wind rose; all night the blast continued, the tide rising to great heights. In the morning visitors even ventured along the cliffs to see it frothing over the stone wall, whilst the rain continued to fall like a drawing down from heaven of unbroken yards of tulle. At noon the wind lessened and an hour later the rain ceased abruptly. Notwith-

having it recoloured, and since the result had left her featureless she had assumed different brows. She made constant trips to the dressmakers, and had hysterics at the results. The *beauté du diable* she craved sometimes made her look accessible, and the simplicity she admired accentuated her weaker points. She endured days of tumult and nights without sleep.

Sefton found himself engrossed, like some specialist, at this pathologic display, as loops of her strange involved disposition were unwound before him all unconsciously. He had applied an X-ray to her soul and every aspect was bared. She was morbid with nerves that clamoured for some natural outlet which they were denied. Under prey of such imaginings she encouraged curious phantasma. She became totally unreasoning, of uncontrolled speech and sinister motives. At other times, her inner organism in ferment, she attempted to quiet between periods of fear and depression by futile extravagance, incontinent quarrelling and objectless travel.

Much that she said was perilously near the truth, but coming from her lips wilfully distorted and misshapen. He was amazed by her acuteness and her inability to overcome her own condition. If pressed to give a reason, she would have found it impossible to tell the motive of her hostility to Miss Cass. She would have denied being anything but her friend, and succeeded partially in convincing herself of her own sincerity.

To-day, under cover of friendliness she gave rein to her suppositions. Leaning forward in her chair, a satin slipper extended from under the black folds of the *Point d'Arras*, she was attempting to give whatever was left of the unfortunate girl one final push with her pointed toe. He listened, perplexed by her understanding, confounded by her keenness, even while he refused all audible comment.

XXVIII

MISS CASS watched Mr. Buel as he extended himself between the two seats, his rather indolent length expressing complete physical relaxation. And yet, in spite of his apathy, Miss Cass was aware he was not perfectly at his ease. She divined that he was afraid of retributive measures since she had made no mention of what had taken place and what still remained before her. She knew he blamed himself, that in his somewhat bludgeoning way he was contrite and thoroughly penitent.

"I am following like a lamb," she said at length. "Mother hasn't told me yet where I am going. She said she would let you tell me."

"We're on our way to France."

"Paris?"

"No. We thought a small place out of season better. Biarritz. I happen to know of a quiet hotel. No one will be there now and mother says rest is the one thing you need. How is that?"

"I am content."

There was a pause.

"May I smoke?"

"Don't be formal."

"Nell," he said, extending his hand, after neither had spoken for several minutes.

"Yes, Jordan," she answered quietly. She permitted hers to lie within his own.

"Do you love me at all?"

"Isn't that rather an undeserved question?"

She saw the colour mount to his head in apoplectic currents but did not relent.

"I mean do you still love me?" he asked.

"Of course."

that were already unfurling their colours. The Alcazar d'Été, the Marigny and the other music halls along the Avenue were preparing for open-air audiences, and the Boulevards were no longer filled with shut-motors. The depression of winter was over and in his heart he was conscious of an encouraging hope that had no basis for existence, and yet could not be eradicated.

He found Monsieur de Lanel waiting for him next day in his *cabinet-de-travail* when he was announced. He was led within and the door closed after him. Seated behind an empire desk surmounted by a great *dossier*, he surveyed his visitor in the surroundings of the pleasant, book-lined room. To all questions he was indefinite, slightly apologetic and always vague. Yes, Edith had made certain ill-advised statements. Ladies were hasty. He did not concur with what she had written. He was distinctly uncertain of the young woman being Miss Cass.

At the end of half an hour he realised the futility of attempting to press Monsieur de Lanel further. He rose, they shook hands, and he took his leave. A footman was summoned to conduct him to the door. As he descended the stairs, the *valet-de-pied* spoke:

"Madame la Marquise wishes to see monsieur before he goes. She is waiting for him downstairs."

"At present?"

"Yes, monsieur."

The door of the *petit salon* was opened.

Madame de Lanel was standing before a commode of tulipwood *cuirré*, surmounted by a bust of Diane de Poitiers, with a great Beauvais tapestry behind making a mellow background to her fairness. She was wearing black, and, as she stood with her back to the light, he could not see if the ornaments she wore were some preposterous dressmaker's decoration or historic sapphires in the great breast-piece which glittered through her lace.

"I asked to have you stop a moment," she said, speaking as though their meeting was a conspiracy, "because I felt there were details Tristram might overlook which would

be helpful to you. You need not tell him so, however. It might seem to him disloyal. . . . He's very delicate on certain points, and the whole affair is *gênant* and has distressed him, naturally."

Her eyes were like agate as she spoke. And there was a subdued excitement in her manner. She led him to two chairs and they seated themselves. As she began to speak his mind wandered, for hers was not a personality to claim one's attention. He heard her words through a mist of perfume of *lilacs d'atlesse* that clouded his sight, while the outline of the real woman etched itself indelibly upon his consciousness.

A strange, complex person, of abortive tenderness and sterile sympathy. A creature given to the constant rehandling of that bric-a-brac which she was pleased to call her "emotions." In a moment he had guessed her secret. She loved her husband with a devotion consuming, neurotic. Affection with her was something which did not invigorate, but strangled. Hers was the love which the ivy feels for the tree it rots, closing in upon it, keeping out the light; an egotism strong, fibrous, interwoven like a tumor, wanting to be a part of its life, its health, its very organism. But her passion was unable to give expression to itself in any of the kindlier forms which would have affected him.

Instead she was very gently thwarted. She was jealous of his every attention and her torment revealed itself in icy silence in which she felt unable to compete with the delicate point of his more scholarly and fluent French. In any exchange of words she was at the disadvantage of speaking a foreign language, whereas his speech was always a model of form, courteous, subtle, idiomatic. She was jealous of his interests of which she was ignorant, of his erudition which she could not follow. She was disappointed in being childless and distressed by her gradually slacking appearance. She suffered through days of depression in which she realised that in spite of her money she was commonplace. Fear at finding her golden hair had lost its lustre had precipitated her into the mistake of

He bowed.

"What an experience. I did all that I could for her before her *first* disappearance—if I may term it that way. Of course you knew she was visiting me?"

Again he agreed.

"I wrote to her mother several notes of condolence, but she never answered any of them. I don't think she understood her daughter. I couldn't write her the second time; instead I placed a statement in the paper. I felt that was the most I could do. I really could not overcome a very natural pride in not addressing Mrs. Cass again."

Out of a flood of reminiscences she checked further words.

"Why don't you dine with us to-night and after dinner my husband and I will tell you everything. I must be excused now. My doctor insists that I lie down every day. My nerves aren't very strong," she said plaintively. "I find I have more enthusiasm than strength. Dinner at 8:30."

Jay Sefton felt the annoyance of being exploited for a purpose, when returning that evening he discovered the Lanels were entertaining. As he entered the *salon* Madame de Lanel detached herself from a vivacious group to approach with an extended left hand. She was wearing petunia satin and all her emeralds. The lights had been attuned to her complexion and in their dimness she looked not unattractive.

"I had forgotten I was giving a dinner to-night when I asked you," she said.

"It doesn't make the least difference in the world. Of course I shan't stay, but I can see you some other time, can't I?"

She laid a hand loaded with rings upon his arm before he could take a step toward the door.

"You can't leave me this way. I've invited a very charming partner just for you," she added shrewdly. "My dinner-table is nicely balanced now and I shan't allow you

to upset it. In Paris you know one introduces. I want you to meet all of the most charming women here."

He knew that Madame de Lanel had not forgotten her dinner. On the contrary, her only reason for coming downstairs that afternoon had been because of an eleventh-hour refusal, and an author would be something of a novelty for her table and quite the easiest way of obtaining a single man. In fact, now that she had him well in hand, she gave up all pretence of continuing this amiable fiction. He found himself with little sympathy for the strategies of the perpetual hostess.

Seated on Madame de Lanel's left his other neighbour proved to be an American lady married to a Frenchman of historic name whose likeness was given to adorning the New York press. He looked across the heaped *épergne* in the centre of the table, to his host. Monsieur de Lanel was still delicate-looking, still withdrawn as though his little ironies with the world were never poignant enough to need expression. His wife was a ready subject for his silent criticisms, Sefton thought, since she had cultivated an imperfect English in order to give the impression of speaking more accurately in the French idiom.

When the ladies withdrew he selected a chair near Monsieur de Lanel and cornered him for a moment. He told of his visit that afternoon and of the Marquise's promise to tell him of their encounter with Miss Cass. He asked him to name an hour when he might hear of their meeting. At first Monsieur de Lanel refused to make any such promise. He had not seen that young lady since she left his roof. But as Sefton persevered and the Marquis failed to dissemble the fact, he at length agreed to see him in his *cabinet-de-travail* at three next day.

Sefton walked home to his hotel that night. Spring was in the air, mild, luscious, promising. He had noticed a tender thread of colour during the day had appeared overhead in the chestnuts, piping each branch with an almost bitter green. Gardeners were busy filling parterres at the Tuileries and the Round Point of the Elysée with tulips

him, that his visitor rose. Monsieur Durand's *avis* was neither of considerable extent nor of great acuteness. His mentality covered a wide surface, but was of thin outlay.

"Should you hear of Miss Cass again in any way, you will perhaps let me know?"

Monsieur Durand was on his feet now.

"With pleasure."

He led his visitor through the lighted library and then paused before the door of the flat. His own appearance with an enlargement of himself astride a hunter, on the wall behind him, in impeccable hunting clothes, surrounded by the hounds of Chevy Chase, was a compromise between luxury and something less than the necessities wherein he lived.

"I have heard of the reward that her father has offered, and if anything that I tell you helps in her recovery I shall, of course, feel that I am deserving of my share of it."

"No doubt."

Monsieur Durand now opened the door, and his visitor made his way down the stairs, striding across the court. He summoned a cab with directions to drive to the Etoile, where he drew up at 1 bis Avenue Kléber. He gave his card to the *valet-de-pied* and requested to see the Marquis de Lanel. After waiting for several minutes he was led up a flight of stairs to the *salon*. An artful assembling of flowers in wedgwood vases were disposed upon consols. The size of the *salon* was lessened by being faintly scented with an essence intimate, suggestive, not of natural flowers.

He had already grown restive when a lady entered. His first impression was of a blondness recently emphasized that had been achieved with rather less skill than is usually attributed to the French coiffeur. She had evidently given up a struggle with pale brows and had them boldly dyed. The effect of black half crescents above her eyes was arresting, but threw the remaining colouring of her face out of scale. The effect would probably be pleasant enough in the interplay of half-light, but in the present surroundings she seemed an over-vivid stencil.

"You will forgive my intruding," she said, speaking with a slight accent which pervaded her speech when she made use of English. "My husband isn't here, but when François brought up your card, I couldn't resist the magic of your name. You see even in Paris we have read 'Unexposed.'"

She smiled at his boyish flush, pleased by his very apparent discomfort. This was a sight that one saw so rarely that certain promptings were gratified by its splendid youthfulness.

"I am Madame de Lanel," she added.

He bowed, then she continued:

"Aren't you going to murmur that national formula of all Americans about being pleased to meet me?"

"I wilfully refrained. I thought it might annoy you."

"Why should you? Of course you know I'm an American. I don't see why people think I'm a foreigner. Do you? My constantly being mistaken for one annoys me so. Our customs are so dear and quaint and I love them everyone, even blueberry pie, and . . . and what does one call them? Oh, yes, doughnuts. Sometimes I've thought of giving up my title if Tristram were willing, but of course that isn't really what makes me seem foreign, is it? It's having a Continental mind."

She had seated herself on a sofa with her back to the light and after these assertions of her nationality she inquired the cause of his present visit to Paris. He replied abruptly that he had come to see the Marquis de Lanel to inquire about Miss Cass, since he knew of their statement of having seen her. At the mere mention of her name all the woman's reluctances were over-borne. He felt rising about them the turgid waters of curiosity. There was a rapacity in her eyes, hard, glittering, the love of news of every sort, even disaster, besides which hunger became a faint subsidiary passion. He lowered his gaze for a moment as a means of veiling his own dislike of her, which in that moment was active.

"Poor Helena," she murmured. "You knew her?"

Louis Quatorze reproductions and enlivened with a quantity of silver-framed photographs of ladies of the *beau monde* and several fashionable *modaines*. His host indicated a chair for him near the window, happily of tinted glass, as a means to interdict an uninspired view. Sefton seated himself while the Frenchman was busied with a brew of tea.

"You are surprised at my persistence in asking to see you," he began. "But I have in my pocket your statement in a French paper made a year after Miss Cass disappeared."

"Yes?"

"That is what I want to ask you about. Will you tell me just where you saw her and exactly what happened?"

Monsieur Durand eyed him for a moment in silence, as though debating how much he would tell. Beneath vague eyes stood wedges of loose flesh, and the eyes themselves had the lack-lustre stare of long-continued irregularities. It was obvious that Monsieur Durand had once been "*beau garçon*" of the Boulevards, but his face now seemed more like that of a pretty woman turned *passé*, which massage had robbed of every expression, leaving only a record of sleepless nights and want of exercise.

Sefton had been puzzled by the memory of having seen this face before without being able to place it. Now the incident fixed itself in his memory. Monsieur Durand was the companion of the lady who had passed him on Fifth Avenue in an open motor last fall, whom he had the hardihood to follow through a fancied resemblance to Helena Cass.

The Frenchman poured tea from a steaming silver urn into two tumblers of clouded amber glass. "Russian style," he remarked simply, as he slipped an elliptic of lemon pierced with a clove into each and passed cigarettes scented with verbenä. Mr. Sefton took a couple of puffs at the nauseous mess and then allowed it to go out. Monsieur Durand had during the interval of tea preparation decided to be frank, and now remarked with his recurring smile

that he would tell all he knew. He spoke a colourless, painstaking English, laboriously manufactured, embellishing his experience with all that detail, the necessary *décor* of an acknowledged raconteur.

Sefton had already obtained information about the Frenchman from other sources. Georges Durand's parents were provincial from the south and he, as a younger man, upon coming to Paris, had made influential friends in the fashionable world through an aptitude for the social graces. But, although an acceptable fourth at bridge, an intelligent critic for a "private view," and especially apt companion at the opening of an atelier of modes, still he was scarcely a *parti* for matrimony. Monsieur Durand had no money of his own nor any prospects. He could live without a perceptible margin off the returns of his calling, but even these were precarious as approaching thirty he was found to be without a future. He had entered the diplomatic corps, been sent to Washington, and had returned greatly disheartened, unable to contract an American match of a desirable kind. To-day he was left in the ignominious position of "looking around." Helpful friends suggested that he was made of the material of a successful motor-car salesman. They held that his acquaintance, his well-cut clothes and his general *empressement* would argue in his favour in pressing sales of the newest de luxe cars on the rich ladies of the half-world and the newer millionaires of trade. Others fancied his being a club secretary, but they were both dismal occupations, and in the meantime he was losing faith in himself. It would not have concerned him to owe money to his tailor; that was a gentleman's privilege, but to be posted at the club savoured of desperate straights.

When he brought his account to an end, he looked at his visitor for approbation. Sefton's eyes were fastened upon the large emerald that glowed sullenly in his tie and he made no immediate comment. It was not until they had reviewed the incident and Monsieur Durand had given all the facts, together with such suppositions as occurred to

discovered the *manta* which Hipolito wore over his shoulder. He had evidently forgotten it in his haste. Picking it up, it seemed to excrete earthly odors and animal as well. It was probably on occasion used as a mule blanket. He reported the incident to the inn-keeper, who assured him that the fellow would return for it directly he was aware of his loss, and when he did the señor should obtain civil answers to his questions. But with nightfall Hipolito did not return.

His host, always ready with explanations, insisted that the gardener had not discovered the loss of his blanket yet. The following day he declared that the fellow was kept hard at work at the convent and would not be allowed time to come to the village until nightfall. Accordingly Sefton waited for him. Undeceived by the gardener's plight, the novelist knew he possessed the entire story of Helena, or otherwise he would not be frightened by what he had told. He had said too much without, however, telling her present hiding-place, if she was still alive. This last motive was the more sobering. He tried again and again to pierce that disorganized brain; fresh tentatives suggested his going to the convent and were put down for a more logical plan.

The inn-keeper continued to urge that nothing short of life or death would decide the simple gardener to relinquish his blanket. But when a second and a third day passed without the man's being heard from, he admitted he was puzzled. But Sefton remained undeceived. He waited until the fourth day, then, as the man did not return, he left abruptly for Paris.

ago, that she left for Paris with her mother and fiancé and later returned. You don't deny that she is here, do you?"

"I don't deny anything?"

"May I accept that, then, as an admission that she is here?"

"Neither do I admit anything. The order is a contemplative one. A secret spoken here is never repeated."

These words were uttered with a lifelessness that was inflexible. Were all his clues to end here? Would there be no word vouchsafed him that would pierce her armour? In the last few hours he had so encouraged the belief she was alive that the sister's words produce a malign reflex. He looked at her large, capable hands folded in her lap. The sweat came to his brow. He felt a sudden stringency about his heart.

"She's not dead?" he asked.

"I cannot tell you."

"You must, mother; you must!"

"You haven't told me who you are."

"My name is Sefton. I'm a friend of Miss Cass. I love her, but I am not her fiancé. Anything you tell me will be as safe with me as with you. I shall never repeat a word of it. If she has become a member of the order and has forsworn the world, I'll go away and no one will know it. Only she wouldn't do that. If for any reason she does not wish to see me I won't press it. I am thinking only of her good. If my being here distresses her, you have only to bring me that message and I shall not come back."

"Who sent you here?"

"No one; I have been searching for months. In spite of the greatest difficulties and weeks of discouragement, I have been able to trace her to this convent. I have come here only because I couldn't rest until I found her. Now, won't you tell me what you know?"

For a moment the vigorous veiled figure remained motionless. Then extending a hand out of her loose sleeve, she rang a silver bell. The portress appeared in the door-

way and the sister gave her an imperious sign, without once opening her lips, and she went away. Only the sound of her rosary at her side and her sandals on the stone floor were audible in surroundings which had imprisoned various degrees of silence now centuries old.

They were evidently waiting for the reverend mother's reply. The minutes were full of portent.

He did not turn in his chair, nor recross his thighs, though his leg was full of tingles, his foot having gone asleep. The blood was thumping in his head. The sister seated across the room from him in the arm-chair remained like some graven image; he could hear the partial articulation of her lips repeating her lesson. There came a click in the wall behind him and he knew the prioress had closed her means of communication with the visitors' parlour.

A moment later the portress returned, gave a sign to the sister, who maintained silence until the other had withdrawn. Then she said:

"The reverend mother thinks it advisable for you to know the truth."

XXXI

THE portress looked at Miss Cass blindly with her weak, near-sighted eyes. Visitors were rare experiences at the convent. The bell ringing in her lodge long after dusk was in itself sufficiently unusual to send Sister Natividad's heart up into her throat. But Helena's appearing from nowhere at that hour of the night and unaccompanied was almost past belief.

Helena had always possessed a dangerous and exotic quality which, to the timid, inexperienced sister, eluded classification. She had forgotten to adjust her steel-rimmed spectacles and so blinked owl-fashion at the intruder, who now entered uninvited. After closing and securely bolting the door, she removed her spectacles from her forehead and placed them astride her nose, peering inquisitively through them. Helena felt a perverse and wilful desire to cry "hoot, hoot!" to the myopic portress.

"It's only I, Sister Natividad," she reassured her, extending her hand pleasantly.

Her gesture possessed the ease of one not readily put out and a not unstudied assurance. But Sister Natividad, never garrulous, remained fluttering and inarticulate, without social graces, while she watched her with uncouth curiosity.

The young woman saw that the portress had given a suspicious glance to the Paris mantle, which hung from her shoulders, artfully shapeless yet shrouding, which covered while it did not define her. Every worldly angle of the hat she wore attested to Rue de la Paix; its decoration was now partially hidden by her veil as she threw it back to show her pale, determined features. A scent totally unknown to the convent, delicate but disquieting, enveloped her.

"You are surprised to see me, Sister Natividad, aren't you?"

"Yes."

It was the portress's uncompromising reply.

"I hope you're not sorry I've come back. May I see the Reverend Mother? And will you tell her it is very important to me to see her?"

The sister watched her a moment unwaveringly. Miss Cass remained silent, her manner charged with a certain authority. Something in the poise of her head and the repose of her clasped hands conveyed in substance that she was accustomed to being obeyed. Sister Natividad, inured to submission, turned and disappeared down the corridor, her sandals shuffling away to the Prioress's sitting-room.

She was not one of the "cerebrals" of the order, Helena made inward comment. She wondered what Mother Espiritu would say when told of her return. She could not imagine the form of words with which the portress would clothe her advent.

There was no chair in the corridor, so that Miss Cass perforce remained standing. An insufficient light fell about her from the small overhead lantern. Minutes passed and Sister Natividad did not return. At first it occurred to her that the Prioress might be occupied with her accounts or checking bills. Then as the time extended she supposed it was the hour of Vespers, in which case the entire convent was in chapel and Mother Espiritu was on her knees in her stall and not to be disturbed.

Miss Cass consulted her watch. It lacked a few minutes of nine o'clock. At nine the bell rang and the last light was extinguished. Her fears had suddenly increased and all her appearance of capability and well-bred aloofness could not cloak a naked dread. She was desperate; in their hands. She was begging asylum after the manner of a street waif, and like one she was being refused. She attempted to steady herself against the blow.

She had decided to make use of falsehood, if necessary,

to insure her entrance. Just what falsehood she did not know. Suppose Mother Espiritu refused to enter into any discussion and declined to see her. What then? Or if she saw her and rejected her plea, what could she say to shake her opposition?

She knew without a strong case it was hopeless. But before she had decided upon what appeal to hang her petition the portress appeared at the end of the corridor alone. As she returned Miss Cass realised her failure and that she was about to be ejected.

"The Reverend Mother will see you in her sitting-room."

She followed the round, bulbous sister, mounted two steps and entered the Prioress's room. No effort had been made to evolve comfort. The walls were bare, distempered like those of the refectory. A writing-table stood before the windows with a small dark-shaded lamp. It was furnished with an ink-horn, a pot of coloured sand and a quill. In a corner were canary and parrot cages, both covered with flannel for the night as a caution against drafts and to insure silence. A niche in the wall upheld a statue in coloured plaster of the Virgin with upraised eyes and a glowing heart projected through her garments. Between the doors, the one by which they had entered and that admitting to the convent parlour, was a large crucifix of ivory, the crown of thorns and loin-cloth of bronze.

Mother Espiritu was seated at her writing-table looking precisely as she had when Miss Cass had gone away. In one hand she held her open breviary. She looked up upon Helena's entrance, but she did not rise. Her eyes as she exchanged a glance with the visitor were not easy to meet. Her face, at all times strangely impersonal, mask-like, did not betray a trace of recognition, although her words acknowledged the other's identity.

"It is the Señorita. Sister Natividad says you asked to see me."

"Yes, Mother."

There was a moment's pause while the applicant rallied

her forces of attack. There was nothing selfless or effaced in the personality of the Prioress. She was dominant, strong-willed; a woman constructed entirely of steel with a thin overlay of flesh, like some priceless porcelain from China, the secret of whose composition had long since been lost. A pale incandescence shone through her flesh. Her eyes were indocile yet as all-seeing as those of the recording angel. She was beautiful in an august, ageless and terrible way. The surrounding whiteness of her scapular with only the relief of her black veil made her seem the less human. And her complete suspension of the animate made one doubt if her eyes could have attachment to bodily wants or suffering. The extraordinary power to benumb rendered Miss Cass silent for several minutes.

"What is it?"

"May I see you alone?"

The portress had remained just inside the door as though in readiness to conduct Miss Cass, at a moment's notice, into the outer darkness. Now at a sign from Mother Espiritu she withdrew.

"I have come to see if I might enter the convent?"

"You mean . . . become a nun?"

"Yes, Mother."

"It's a pity you didn't put your request into writing. It would have saved you a useless trip."

"You are not going to refuse me?"

"You are not of the faith, señorita. And there are other reasons why you are particularly unfitted."

Miss Cass did not avoid the Prioress's eyes.

"What reasons?" she asked.

"Your prospective motherhood."

"Surely a child would not be in the way for the first months. When old enough to be taken from me he shall be sent to my mother. Then I can be free to enter upon the term of my postulancy, and later become a novice and still later a member of the order."

"If your resolution has not changed a year from now, when your child can be separated from you, return to me

and you will be admitted as a postulant. At present it's impossible."

"Don't turn me away, Mother."

There was fear in her voice.

"What has suddenly attracted your attention toward religion?"

"The time spent here. It was very peaceful. I didn't suppose that in all the world there was so peaceful a life."

"I'm afraid that isn't religion. You're impulsive. You've been unhappy."

"What difference does the impulse make, Reverend Mother, provided it leads me to the same goal?"

Twenty minutes later when Miss Cass left Mother Espiritu's sitting-room she had received partial consent to have the shelter of the convent for a time at least. She could not remember what arguments she had made use of to convince the Prioress of her fitness. She only realised she had gained her point, and a feeling of peace and safety flooded her with a reminder of her unworthiness that was not far removed from religious exultation.

Mother Espiritu was at all times decisive, without irresolution. The order of the Sisters of the Adoration was contemplative, not active. They had at no time opened their gates as a retreat for the worldly wishing temporary solace from the world. Nor was theirs a school for the instruction of the laity. Since they had accepted a young woman ill and indigent several months before, there seemed little reason to refuse her now that she was in health and unimpooverished. It was not a matter about which to communicate to the Mother General of the Mother House the Prioress decided, although the act was contrary to anything she had done before. She undertook the entire responsibility of the additional soul under her roof. The sisters would not be contaminated by her presence nor unsettled at their devotions. While it could be put to vote at the next chapter, it was an unwritten law that no preference of Mother Espiritu's was ever voted against.

The portress was summoned and given her instructions.

A moment later she returned with Sister Amparo. The latter, a detached and communicative spirit, was filled with only a half-concealed excitement. She carried Miss Cass's dressing-bag and led her upstairs to her cell. This was in a new wing of the convent, disconnected from the rest and above the infirmary. Here the returned visitor was removed from the novices, who were to remain ignorant of her presence and without speculation on her condition. It was an audacious step to take, but Mother Espiritu had the rank of a grandee of Spain and had she not been a Prioress she would probably have been a statesman. Her decisions, if at any time strange, were never reproved and rarely regretted.

As Sister Amparo set down her candle on the little washstand she looked admiringly at Miss Cass's clothes, and asked where she had been. Did she really wish to become a nun? Did she feel she had a vocation? And how had it made itself felt? Had God spoken to her? Had she been conscious of a vision?

Then of a sudden she reminded her it was after hours, instructed her to undress as rapidly as possible and put out her light as Benediction had sounded half an hour ago. A second later she was gone.

The days which followed did not pass quickly to the visitor at the convent of the Sisters of the Adoration. Sister Amparo explained to her Mother Espiritu's instructions. Since Miss Cass had decided to become one of the sisterhood, it was agreed that the present time could be looked upon as a period of meditation preceding the retreat. One of the preliminaries was that since she would later discard the name by which she was known in the world, she could now be called Maria Pia, anticipatory to becoming Sister Maria Pia.

Any such preparations impressed her as quite harmless and unominous. What difference did it make if she was called by her baptismal name or "Pia," excepting that the latter tended to conceal still further her identity. She was pleased by these holy disguises. When the time came her

means of extricating herself from any obligations or entanglements of the order she knew would be as simply effected as had her entrance.

She was not proud of her deceit now that it had gained her access to the convent. Nothing could be less admirable than her methods of lying to the simple, trusting sisters about a pretended vocation. While the order was not poor she knew her understanding with Mother Espiritu that they would be enriched by her presence had not been without consideration. She would allow them to remain undeceived of her intentions to become a *religieuse* until after the birth of her child. Then she could explain, naturally enough, that her maternal longings convinced her that her place was in the world. She would make the sisters a handsome gift as restitution toward their losing her. At odd moments she debated what form this gift should take. A rose window above the altar. It would delight the Prioress. Or had it not better be something of her own selection? It was less important that it be intrinsically beautiful than that the sisters thought it so. Their taste was not always authoritative she had noticed from the artificial flowers at the shrines. Whatever the cost her mother would gladly advance the money for it which would be returned to her directly she was married.

She felt increasingly weary of the subterfuge which interposed itself between her and the union with Jordan Buel. The time of her marriage now seemed further and further removed. Every action of hers was plunging her deeper into a morass of prevarications and lies. Could she ever cut her way out into the air again?

She was awakened on her first morning by the ringing of the bell and annoyed that her sleep was interrupted by any such distractions she turned in her narrow bed without opening her eyes. A moment later Sister Amparo tapped on her door to tell her the conventual routine.

The bell rang at 6.15 and at present her rising was obligatory. At 6.30 were morning prayers, then Prime and Tierce. At 7 mass, "Mea Maxima Culpa," and exposition.

At 7.45 breakfast, following which the sisters washed the stone floors of their cells, made their beds and dusted their few possessions. Even these objects which were given them they were forced to exchange at the end of the year in order to destroy all attachment and keep their minds free from transitory interests. Every hour of the day was systematised until De Profundis, "the great silence," and the next morning.

Sister Amparo explained the rules would be relaxed later on as necessity demanded until she had completely regained her health and was once more normal. She was not expected at Mass in chapel or to share their meals in the refectory. Beneath her cell in the infirmary were two invalid sisters, one said to be over eighty, and a lay sister would serve her meals with them. The strict diet upheld by the rest of the nuns was adjusted, by the Prioress's orders, that she might have strengthening food. She was given the lives of the saints to read, instructed to pray and meditate and allowed to remain idle for hours in the kitchen garden. Here she sat alone separated by hedges from the courtyard and cloister where she could hear the laughter of the novices at recreation. The thought of living through a succession of such purposeless days appalled her.

In desperation she made the acquaintance during the afternoon of the only man at the convent, Hipolito, the half-witted gardener. Conversation received slight fillup from him, however. In reply to her remarks Hipolito shook his head, or when he found words they came in such a torrent of sound that she understood him still less and restricted herself to gestures and comments of only the most obvious kind.

Before the day was over she had written a telegram which was despatched to her mother in Paris. The gardener carried it to the village and saw to its sending and though the wire was cryptic to the average reader, to Mrs. Cass, who remembered the cipher, it was clear and reassuring. The message was purposely uninforming to protect

her against newspapers and detectives and ran as follows:

"Convent accepts lace commission. Work on same continues normal and satisfactory. If all goes well should be delivered about the middle of April."

It was signed "Sister Maria Pia."

This was followed by no reply according to agreement and yet Maria Pia had hoped that her mother could devise some means of getting word to her in safety. She realised the risk of every wire or letter. That her own had not furnished a clue was fortuitous but not to be repeated.

It was three weeks later that she received the first letter. It was sent from New York and while their return was a part of their plan to assist her, the knowledge that they were at home and an ocean separated them filled her with depression. The letter was written on plain business paper and had been posted by their lawyer. The superscription read: "To the Reverend Mother Espiritu of the Convent of the Sisters of the Adoration." Within the envelope it was directed simply to "Sister Maria Pia."

Mrs. Cass wrote that the great storm of curiosity which had broken at the time of her daughter's disappearance had subsided to a great degree, although her being seen so recently at Biarritz and Paris had encouraged the newspapers to fresh activities. Several of their own letters showed only too plainly that they had been opened before they had reached them and their telephone had been continually tapped. The result was that they had agreed not to mention her even indirectly amongst themselves in order to assure their not being caught. Moreover, in their effort to disabuse present scepticism as to her disappearance she and Annis had ordered half-mourning.

Mrs. Cass explained that her father, not being convinced of her death, had increased his reward and only the greatest caution could keep her from being found. She had attempted to urge him to withdraw his offer and refuse the offices of the Secret Service but in this she had failed as in other efforts. Mr. Cass remained totally ungovernable

and the idea of telling him the truth was not to be thought of.

She had suggested in case his daughter was guilty of any moral delinquency that his present methods of encouraging the press would not make her return likely. But Mr. Cass having orientated a certain pose and found it effective refused to abandon it. Maria Pia knew instinctively that her father did not want her found; first it would necessitate his paying the reward; and second he would have to yield his prominence to her. Therefore he had replied to his wife with the utmost vehemence that if their daughter was to blame for her downfall she ceased to be any daughter of his.

Mrs. Cass cautioned Maria Pia not to refer in her reply to anything contained in the present letter. All communications should be addressed to their man of business, Mr. Guthrie Thomas, at his office in Pine Street. Letters intended for Mr. Buel would be readdressed in business envelopes to his secretary's office in Detroit, there to be opened by Mr. Buel. Those intended for her mother, Roscoe or Annis would be handed them by Mr. Thomas in person. In this way they minimised all dangers, at least for the present.

Mr. Buel's letters were brief if not circumspect. Articulation on paper had never been a simple matter for him. For the most part he restricted himself to outpourings of love and regret at his impotence to be of service at that distance. The return to America had been to confuse the detectives on the scent and convince them that he had abandoned the search as hopeless. He was impatient to hear of the birth; to know she was free to return to the world. Just in what way she intended to explain her absence he did not know, but she was always so resourceful that he had implicit trust in her judgment to expel all mysteries. This done, they would be married and the hateful secrecy ended.

She realised the danger of replying openly and spent days in composing her answers. She wished to have her

letters simple, transparent, with a seeming absence of intention to the casual reader and a second meaning apparent only to her mother or Mr. Buel. None of the sisters were supposed to receive word from the world until the Prioress had decided upon its fitness. But she understood no English and as Maria Pia had not yet been ordained she was allowed a greater latitude. Later on, not to be outdone by Mrs. Cass's thoroughness, she bribed the good Sister Amparo to copy her letters in her strangely foreign hand.

Winter passed.

Rainy days were the hardest to endure since her walks were then restricted to the space under the cloisters. In spite of the absence of heat, she was never cold and much of the time actually feverish.

She lost her colour. Her eyes looked haunted. It seemed to Maria Pia that every vestige of good looks forsook her. If her appearance did not improve following the baby's birth she hoped she would not survive it. Mr. Buel could have no interest in the sunken-eyed woman with high cheek-bones and bloodless lips. She wore always the one grey woollen dress the sisters had made for her, not unlike the habit of the order, with loose, ungainly sleeves. The neck band was fastened with a white collar, her dark hair plaited and hidden under her cap.

With the beginning of April the weather turned warmer. The earth, as filled with moisture as a sponge, began to send up anonymous shoots. The trees broke into bud, and the canaries outside the Prioress's window chirped all morning.

As the period of her confinement drew nearer she was surprised that she did not face the ordeal with calm. The one implacable fact which forced itself upon her attention was that she would be without medical aid. To be sure, the infirmarian would take the best care of her that she could, but the sister had lived a cloistered life and was without experience.

Maria Pia doubted if the town boasted a practitioner of ability, but in any case he was denied her. The order

had bound themselves to observe perpetual enclosure, and though during the past twenty-five years they had fallen into greater relaxation, no such departure as the Prioress's present one in accepting her had been considered before. For a doctor to attend a young woman at childbirth within the convent would place Mother Espiritu in dispute.

Her present feeling was not fear of death, so she assured herself. Nor was it regret at being unable to see her mother or fiancé again. For oddly enough the personalities of both now seemed merged and appeared as one, the only kind and beneficent friend in the world who loved her. She was haunted by a feeling of being utterly alone in an atmosphere where life or death were matters of total inconsequence. Sister Amparo's attempt to comfort her with assurances that in case of death she would be anointed and given the last sacrament failed utterly. And when the lay-sister talked earnestly of being a "bride of the Lord" Maria Pia had to curb an inclination to become light and irreligious. She was conscious that her condition was more physical than otherwise, and that she was not entirely responsible for her longings.

The continued discipline, arduous and unrelaxed, irked her. She was maddened by the rules governing intercourse. She might be a quarantine patient set aside in a ward of infectious disorders for all the fellowship which prevailed. She could not speak to the Superiors unless first spoken to. The Prioress she had not seen more than three times since her entrance. The other sisters merely inclined their heads slightly as they passed her, except for Sister Amparo, but she was a lay-sister with rarely a moment for meditation. The lay-sisters discharged all work of the convent and their only dissatisfaction with their condition was that it deprived them of sufficient time for prayer. Therefore the periods designated as "recreation" Sister Amparo occupied in reciting her office.

Maria Pia had written to the chief bookseller in Madrid for a list of books. But upon their arrival the Prioress

had investigated the package and been scandalised by its contents. It seemed that the greater part of the modern writers of Spain were not endorsed by the church. The books were burned and Maria Pia's avid taste for companionship was not whetted by those recommended from the convent shelves.

She had attempted social conversation with the aged invalids in the infirmary but one was toothless and Maria Pia's efforts at understanding a foreign language that was largely swallowed made her hysterical. The other sister rarely spoke but sat for hours with opaque eyes, while her rosary passed intermittently through her lean fingers, yellow as parchment. Her face was emaciated and her lips murmuring a continuous Pater, Ave and Gloria seemed worn away by perpetual praying.

She became afraid that looking at the elderly nuns might have a bad impression upon her child and so cultivated an annoying trait of looking away while addressing them. Hipolito had ceased to be an invigourating companion. At present there was little or no work to be done out of doors. Earlier she had transplanted bulbs from the greenhouse and taken to weeding borders but even that was too wearisome for her at present. She longed to learn lace-making to keep her hands occupied but had grown too "nervous" for exacting work.

One evening she returned to her cell to see if a letter had arrived from her mother. Letters came more frequently from Mr. Buel now that the time drew nearer. But she hoped this one would be from her mother, for after all she felt hers would contain greater comfort and be more understanding. As she opened her door she looked on her bed; it contained no letter. The bed, like all others, was narrow, spotlessly white, with a brass crucifix against the pillows.

She started in search of Sister Amparo when *De Profundis* sounded. At that moment she heard the lay-sister's step in the passage and went to meet her.

"You are just the person I want to see," she said. "Will you copy a letter for me, dear sister?"

She made her request in her most winning way, but Sister Amparo gave no sign of having heard her.

"I know the bell has sounded for silence, but I'm not asking you to speak. I will do the talking and take the punishment. You can just answer by shaking your head. Will you?"

Still there came no answer.

At length, as Maria Pia realised the faithful lay-sister could not be urged to enter into this deception, she tore open her door and re-entered her room violently. Throwing herself upon her bed, she grasped the crucifix and breviary and hurled them across the room, crying:

"Dash the great silence. . . . *Dash* it! Do you hear? And dash Saint Jerome!"

Then she broke into unrestrained tears, her whole body heaving while she moaned like a creature in pain.

Sister Amparo stood in the doorway transfixed, shocked beyond expression. In all her life she had never witnessed any such outburst of racking emotion. She picked up the cross and placed it reverently on the washstand and then smoothed out the creased pages of the breviary. Maria Pia, seeing her expression, attempted to beg her pardon.

The four bronze bells of the convent were named for four saints. Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Francis d'Assisi, Saint Benedict and Saint Jerome. The bell which rang announcing the silence was "Saint Jerome."

"I didn't mean," Maria Pia said, subsiding, while she dried her tears on her frontlet, "that I dashed the real Saint Jerome. I only meant dash the bell or dash the clapper. I'd take it out if I thought I could. I'm sorry. I'll try to be good. But you don't know what it's like, Sister Amparo, to be all alone. You've got God, but I've got nobody. Come here to me."

And placing her arms around Sister Amparo, she kissed her on both cheeks.

It was after midnight that she tapped with her boot

against the connecting wall between hers and Sister Amparo's cell. After several minutes the lay-sister appeared in the doorway and lighted her candle. She did not ask any questions. As she saw Maria Pia's convulsed face she understood. She withdrew and returned a little later with the infirmarian, Sister Celestina.

Maria Pia was rocking with pain.

The infirmarian sent directly for assistance and another sister came who stood at the foot of the bed watching the patient in her torment. She had never seen this sister before and asked her name.

"She is Mother Salome," said Sister Celestina.

Maria Pia began to laugh in a relaxed and foolish way. Her laughter increased after she had repeated the name until the passage rang with it. It was uncontrolled laughter, hysteric, unpleasant. The sisters exchanged glances of distress. Their patient was evidently delirious.

And then in the midst of her laughter she was clutched in the maw of pains that silenced her. She had not supposed it possible for anyone to endure such agony. She felt faint. She thought she was on the verge of losing consciousness. But the longed-for oblivion did not come. The pain racked her through a mist that was enveloping her and her surroundings. She moaned aloud. She felt that the delicate bones of her body were being crushed in the grip of an iron girder. Her teeth bit her pillow. Sister Celestina pressed a handkerchief saturated with ether to her nose.

She breathed it. She gasped, feeling giddy, reeling. Her hands gripped the iron bar above her head as her last contact with realities began to slip from her and she braced herself to endure. . . .

XXXII

MARIA PIA forgot she was a prisoner when she sat in the cloistered garden, to which she was now admitted with the sleeping bundle in her arms. The return of spring, with hours of unbroken warmth, produced a well-being and contentment in which both mother and son thrived.

The nuns would have wakened the child at all hours to pluck a flower and see him smile had Maria Pia not insisted upon discipline. As it was he slept the greater part of the day with only periodic interruptions. The convent was innocent of a cradle but a basket was found wherein he lay on a pillow, with an open umbrella placed above him as protection from the sunlight. And nearby on the stone bench Maria Pia sat, listening to the canaries of the Prioress overhead and watching the flowers expand and bloom in the dazzling sunlight.

Unprotected from the glare were strange looking, tropical begonias, that seemed to be always thrusting out their tongues, as though making faces. And red lilies that looked like lateen sails. There were beds of blue forget-me-nots above which the red tulip Cardinal lifted scores of goblets as though proposing a toast in blood. There were shocks of colour in bands, Michaelmas daisies, monk's hood and clove pinks surrounded by borders of ribbon grass, and against the convent walls were outspread espaliers where nectarines would later ripen.

In a circle of water lived a group of goldfish quite tame and always greedy for crumbs. At her approach they darted toward the edge of the basin, each crimson entity seeming 'he petal of a flower, with which they formed themselves into patterns unknown to the horticulturist, and when gratified darted into the depths like a scattering of fugitive flames.

May was the month dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and there were ceremonies and masses every day with the altar vases filled with a succession of Madonna lilies and candles burning at every shrine. There were different jewels upon the hands of the Virgin, her finest diadem upon her brow and the altar cloths exposed were of lace like cobwebs. In the choir the nuns wore their black mantles, and the convent was barefooted, as was the custom of their order, from the first of May until the feast of the exaltation of the Holy Cross in September.

Pia now joined in all the exercises of the day, meditation, recitation of the Divine Office, spiritual exercises, Matins and Lauds which were recited in the evenings. Five strokes of "Saint Thomas Aquinas" were given as a reminder of the benefits conferred by the Holy Eucharist.

Pia had never debated what name she would give her child, but almost at once decided upon John. The name was brief, virile and commonplace, all of them excellent attributes for a man. At the same time it was non-committal, which in her position was very necessary. It was some time later that she realized it was her father's name, although he had elected to be known as "J. de Witte Cass," but the irony of the coincidence afforded her a smile.

Her plans for leaving the convent had been made several weeks before. They were simple and perhaps less disingenuous than Mr. Jordan Buel had been led to expect. This was a question which had at no time been absent from her mind since she had taken refuge in the order. She would remain where she was until she felt relatively safe in leaving John. When that time arrived she would draw from her mother's account at Morgan, Harjes et Cie in Paris and come suddenly out into the open. Once more before the public she would explain that she had been stolen and then left unconscious at the convent. Following the shock of this experience her memory had deserted her. The good sisters had allowed her retreat and there she had remained unmolested until a few days since when she had begun to recall her past, her name and family.

This would require acting of a high order but Pia had felt capable to acquit herself of the demands of her situation. Mr. Buel would hasten from America; they would be married in England, remaining on the continent for several months. Upon her return, John, still in the custody of some trustworthy woman, would be another passenger, and by this woman be claimed as her own. Later, a year or two years, John would be adopted by Mr. Buel, perhaps as a playmate for a younger child, perhaps because they were without children, as the case might be.

There were weak spots in this scheme and yet of the many she turned over in her mind it seemed the most reasonable. Aphasia was a not infrequent ailment and the convent, never seeing the press, did not know who she was. As to her childbirth, the nuns could be trusted. Secrecy was the mainstay of the order and a confession remained inviolate.

The only obstacle to this procedure was that she had changed her mind. The great superstructure of fabrication upon which everything had rested suddenly collapsed. Out of its ruins she found herself serene, unharmed. And for some reason which she was powerless to fathom she felt that for the first time she had come into her strength. She had passed through a long and tortured delirium, had at length emerged, laid claim to her identity and found herself intact.

The means whereby these results were achieved were still beyond her. At first Mr. Buel had scrupulously upheld his share of the agreement of exchanging letters only once a month. Then as the period of danger drew near he wrote more often until his letters came twice a week and later by almost every post. She was aware that his assurances of love were growing slightly repetitional. After all, there were not many modes of expression whereby a lover could write the woman of his heart that he had kept faith with her, and Mr. Buel seemed to have exhausted them all.

The climax resulted from his answer to her letter announcing the birth of John. Overjoyed at the safe de-

livery and her own gain in strength he wrote that he would sail for Europe directly. This move was the last step she desired. Pia found herself growing curiously combative toward this element of his of working out his own schemes and expecting her to conform to their requirements as they arose. Her immediate rejoinder was terse:

"Don't sail. Am writing."

But the letter which was to follow this message was not a simple one to indite and Pia devoted days to its deliberation. A psycho-analysis of which she was conscious but scarcely understood gripped her. It possessed an undercurrent of mental revulsion that in its intensity warned her was not to be thwarted. All she could do was accept it on its face value as proof that she no longer loved Jordan Buel.

She could not find any adequate explanation of what had taken place. She had loved him. She no longer loved him. That was all. She could not account for the undoubted finality of her feelings, since they had been without renewals or further contacts. Something had left her and in the place of love was a critical distaste.

Pia continued to reassure herself that this was a transitory state from which she would later on emerge. Young women on the brink of matrimony often had tremors and were victims of emotional vertigo. At least women of a past generation had indulged in such inversions. Was her present indifference anything more?

And if so, to what did she owe it? Mr. Buel had not changed she knew. A sense of character and a knowledge of values fed upon meditation told her he was not a man who would change. He would remain always very much as he was now, rather young for his age, unimaginative, a little heavy, a trifle settled, fired by her spirit and daring.

His love for her was not love in her sense but a rather highly coloured preference. He preferred her to any girl he knew. The discrepancy in their ages he was not strikingly aware of. A certain boyish quality about him, the result of little depth of thought, would always keep him on

an easy footing with her contemporaries. She saw him now for what he was. That her vision was a little cruel was not her fault. Nor was she to blame for having fancied him a man of substance and attainments. He was the only man she had ever known. But her eyes were opened, and the sight of him manifest in the continued tedium of his letters was not to be renewed in the flesh.

The fact that she no longer loved Jordan Buel did not automatically close the relationship. The predicament was not so simple. She had placed herself in a situation whereby she could not be easily disembarassed of him. Mr. Buel was ready and waiting to marry her, and each delay would only have the effect of increasing an amatory impatience already excessive. She regretted being the means of causing him pain, but after all he had not been over-careful of her. Yet she bore him no resentment for anything but his persistence in wanting to marry her.

What means had she of letting him down gradually? How could she give him his congé without being brutal? Though the attachment galled she realised he was in no way to blame for her change of heart. She did not love him and there was nothing to be gained either by correspondence or in confronting each other.

But the further she withdrew the more she knew he would advance. Pia realised that each effort to put him off would only serve to ignite him further. If she told him she no longer loved him he would not believe it. He would wish to argue. He would ask her what had happened. He would have theories, masculine theories, that a woman never ceases to love one man unless she has fallen in love with another. He would declare that once removed from the religious environment his embraces would serve to restore her lost equilibrium.

And then Pia was amazed by the memory of her mother's intuition. Mrs. Cass had assured her the summer previous when in Paris that she did not love Jordan Buel. She was stunned by the accuracy of her mother's understanding of her; the intensity of her feeling and its instant recoil.

What was she to do?

Why had she changed?

The rapidness of regretting past actions was an indulgence which she had never allowed herself. What was past was past. Nor had she any thought to disinter its ashes.

Pia felt that she owed Jordan Buel's love every consideration. On the other hand she felt an indifference that removed him to an outer limbo beyond her abysmal contempt. The male who urges the female whom he considers his rightful mate to relinquish herself to him before marriage was equally compounded bounder and fool. There was no defence for him since he was lacking in the essentials of honour and decency. He had lost her love not through the wrong he had done her, but through the absence of manhood of which he stood convicted; an all-pervading second-rateness, mental, moral, actual.

Suddenly through the entanglement there appeared a way out.

It was slow and tortuous but it led to freedom. She would declare that she had gained a vocation. She had decided to renounce the world and be ordained, binding herself to perpetual enclosure.

The audacity of the idea startled her. It would insure her of never seeing him, since she would write she had no intention of renewing any friendships in the world. No good could come of good-byes or last interviews as they would only unsettle her now that her resolve had been made. That being so, it was futile for him to come abroad with the intention of urging her to reconsider a decision on which her peace of mind depended. It would also free her from a mass of letters of remonstrance and recrimination since they would not be allowed her. The security of her position would be unique.

No such disclosure as this, however, could be flung at him unwarned. Step by step she must prepare him for what was to come. She composed her first letter, begging him to return to the original schedule of writing, as his impor-

tunity was likely to betray her to detectives. As she loved her child with increasing fervour the mere thought of separating herself from him, even for a short time to satisfy expediency, was not to be entertained. She knew of no woman in whose care she could trust John. And of what use to maintain her reputation in the world if through this act she was to lose her son? She had therefore reached the conclusion that she must remain with the nuns until John was eight or ten months old, when the dangers of trusting him to a stranger would be minimised.

Mr. Buel's replies, while expostulatory, realised the soundness of her arguments, so that they spent themselves in the usual regrets and the declaration that he would be waiting for her when the time came.

In her answer she explained how peaceful the routine of the conventual life had become. It was a solace to her now that the beauty of their rites and abstinence were manifest, as she realised herself more attuned to her environment. The nuns were the happiest people in the world and she understood so easily the call of the religious life.

His answer made no comment to these observations and Pia knew she had gained little headway in her preparations. She wrote more openly that she found her cloistered life among the pleasantest she had ever known. And she questioned if she would ever be as happy elsewhere.

Mr. Buel's only allusion to these lines was to say she evidently had a meagre opinion of matrimonial delights. And he closed with the wager that his first kiss would cause her to forget that she had ever been in a convent.

She smiled at his fatuity.

His persistence in not understanding began to annoy. It was discouraging this attitude of his of not realising he had ceased to matter. Was it the fault of Mr. Buel's egotism that he could not grasp the idea that a young woman should pass beyond the stage of loving him?

She answered bluntly that she would not leave the convent when planned. Each day she realised more and more that she possessed a vocation.

Buel's reply was that her "vocation," as she called it, was to make him happy, and it would engage all her attention to do so. He did not seem aware of any anticlimax in this statement. Over-indulgence in religion, he wrote, was intemperance just as much as that of a grosser kind. And then came an obscene reference to a father confessor. . . . If she had ever thought him second-rate, these lines seemed amply corroborative.

Pia waited weeks and then wrote she had decided to be "received." She was sorry to tell him but, of course, he had suspected it for months past as he realised her reluctance to leave the order. She could never see him again, and while she hoped for his forgiveness as she forgave him, any letters beyond his next would be returned by the Reverend Mother unopened.

His letter came.

It was bitter, ungenerous, full of feeble satire and cowardly denunciation. He claimed religion was a new emotion with her and would not last. She would tire of God as she had tired of him and what would be left her then? Where could she turn for succour after imprisoning herself from life? In the meantime, what was to become of him? Or had he no place in her present scheme? What had he ever done to deserve such neglect? Wasn't he her rightful husband? Hadn't he at all times been tender, chivalrous, affectionate? . . . And was he in payment for a two years' debt of waiting to be thrown over for a religious flirtation. . . . The abuse became offensive. . . .

Later two more letters arrived from him and were returned.

After that was silence.

The rigours of winter ended; spring emerged, giving way to a wilting summer.

In the garden of the Sisters of the Adoration there was no change. The air was heavy with the fragrance of flowers. The water in the fish pond became so warm that the fish were transferred to other quarters. John took his afternoon nap regularly under the shade of a fig tree, and

Pia remained faithful, near at hand, in the breathless garden continuing a desultory botanising.

One afternoon toward the end of summer she was seated in her usual haunt, her mind adrift, watching a bee humming toward a campanile of Canterbury bells. The flowers swayed slightly as though to attract him, but he refuted their boldness and sped away to a foxglove. She saw him enter its trumpet masterfully and watched him as he lay on its bosom covering himself with golden pollen in his greed for love. He lay silent as though dead, his antlia driven deep into the heart of the flower. The foxglove began to rock him gently to and fro, thrilled as though with voluptuous enjoyment. Slowly he staggered out of the hood of its sweetness, flexing his legs, then flew away, weak, uncertain, as though drunk with passion. The flower began to close, as though denying itself to others, and a little later a breath of wind blew its hood to the ground; its hour of romance having been fulfilled its life was over.

Engrossed in this horticultural fancy she noticed the draped bulk of one of the sisters detach itself from the shadow of the cloister and enter the garden. Not wishing to be interrupted in her reverie Pia closed her eyes intending to affect sleep. She knew idleness was deplored, but she was in no mood for either work or prayer. She heard the sister's sandals on the flagged walk and the beads of her rosary click at her side while she moved, and then become silent as she came to a standstill before her. The sister called her by name:

"Maria Pia!"

Opening her eyes she looked up into the unruffled face of Mother Salome.

"You shouldn't be asleep here. I'm afraid you will have sunstroke."

Her voice of seeming solicitude Pia instinctively distrusted. She was conscious of inharmonious vibrations and knew that she and Mother Salome were marked for enmity.

"Werē you one of those who spent the night in prayer?"

"No, Mother Salome."

"I can't think what makes you so tired."

"Probably because I am not thoroughly accustomed to the life."

Mother Salome remained standing before her in the attitude usual among sisters, each hand hidden in the full sleeve of the other arm. Her expression was judicial.

"My dear daughter, that is exactly what I want to talk to you about. How long have you been at the convent?"

She felt a sudden uprush of fear as she realised the readiness of her reply had helped to precipitate this question. She had always known that this was an eventuality which must some day be faced, but with the passing of months without allusion to it, it had of late gone from her memory. She returned Mother Salome's calm scrutiny.

"Two years and five months," she said.

"Precisely my own calculations, daughter. You entered with the idea of joining the order, did you not?"

"Certainly, Mother Salome."

"Well, my daughter, you have had more than time enough to search your heart. Have you decided to take the vows?"

Pia did not remove her eyes from the inscrutable face before her. The thought of taking the vow of stability like the rest of the order and later separating herself from her boy filled her with terror. Mother Salome did not move but remained before her waiting her reply.

"I am listening, my daughter."

"Yes and no."

"I thought so. And just what does that reply mean?"

"It means, dear Mother, that all the spiritual side of me rejoices in the peace and sanctity of the enclosure. . . . But the other side. . . ."

"The other side is the evil of your nature. That must be fought and overcome. Pray to God that you may increase in grace and humility before His eyes and be deemed worthy to be a bride of the Lord."

"As it happens the other side of my nature is my motherhood."

For a moment Mother Salome was silenced, and then continued earnestly:

"I think the Reverend Mother explained to you that this was not an active order, so that you entered under no misapprehension. I can't think what would be the opinion of the Mother House if it was understood that you came here for other than religious purposes. You know you have been granted special indulgence, and I can only say that I shall insist that the question of your remaining is put to the vote at the next chapter. That will take place in a week. And I may say I am confident of the result."

"That will mean my eviction?"

"It will mean you must make an immediate choice between the order and the world. I am not charging you, my daughter, with attempting to hoodwink the sisters. But you knew the monastic ideal before entering, and you have no reason for shilly-shallying. You have a vocation or you haven't. In either way your future is cut out for you."

Having spoken Mother Salome continued on her way and Pia remained a prey to depression. She had put off the evil hour, but the decision could not be postponed any longer.

If she left the convent with John she would be recognized almost at once. That would mean a reconstruction of all that had taken place, peccant, degrading, incontestable. All the actualities of the last three years laid bare; newspapers would gloat over the items; the cinema depict her struggles. All the channels of vulgarity to which America had access would be placed at her disposal. But even though she had sufficient bravado to face press and public, where could she go? She could not return home even though she were willing to so humble herself. She knew her father would not offer her shelter unless married. A curious sensation of pulse and nerves told her that Jordan Buel could not be tolerated even though he were still willing to have her.

It meant branding John with a disgrace he could never in later life throw off, a sensational illegitimacy. It meant reducing her mother, Annis and Roscoe to objects of specu-

lation of the morbidly curious. And she herself would act as buffer to the advances of the criminal and obscene. Decidedly no, such a release was not possible.

To remain meant taking permanent vows, sacrificing herself to a life of silence and drudgery. Already the regular practice of offices filled her undisciplined nature with revolt. She appreciated the piety of the nuns, motivated by God without thought or inclination of their own, passing through emotionless days, where prayers came automatically to their lips, and the wooden rosary slipped mechanically through their calloused hands. Nor was that all. It meant relinquishing all claim to John; not seeing him; not knowing life; no longer feeling the pulse of the world. It meant living, perhaps, until eighty like the sister in the infirmary, and then dying only because the habit of life had run down.

The hand she placed to her brow was wet. Her nerves were jangling. The decision seemed already beyond her power to act. Life imprisonment in the order; public disgrace in the world. Both were equally repellent, and she knew she could steer no middle course.

Two hours later Pia had not moved when the bell rang for Vespers and Benediction.

XXXIII

Six months passed without incident.

Maria Pia never knew if Mother Salome put her threat into practice and it was defeated; or if she hesitated to make her views known to the Prioress, since the Reverend Mother had not interrogated her on that subject. The latter view was the more likely. All of the sisters stood in the greatest awe of Mother Espiritu, an awe to which Maria Pia herself subscribed.

For days Pia remained ill with dread. As she filed in and out of the chapel her step hurried in passing Mother Salome, her head always bent so as not to meet her eyes. She was occupied now every moment of the day, her one effort being to seem as self-efface as possible. But she could not suppose herself lost among the thirty sisters since she was not yet "clothed" and was conscious that her grey dress marked her apart from the habit of the others. The sisters wore a black robe, their scapular, mantle and veil white and upon their breasts a copper image.

In the refectory the Prioress recited grace with responses from the sisters, following which the reader ascended to the high reading desk and read aloud verses of Holy Scripture. This finished, all responded *Deo Gratias* and each took her accustomed seat. Mother Espiritu sat on a rush-bottomed chair at the head of the table and Mother Salome at the foot with the sisters and novices ranged along between on low forms, the latter with the novice mistress. The walls of the refectory were unadorned except by an image of the Sacred Bambino under a glass globe beneath which a tallow dip burned in a cup. On the long uncovered deal table were set their tin cups and plates, and the noise of them and the novices' shrill voices, now allowed their apportionment of speech, were deafening.

Pia kept her eyes on her plate during meals, never asked for more and glanced only furtively at the foot of the table. She could give no explanation of Mother Salome's silence. At times it seemed to her that she might, all unconsciously, have made a friend of the Reverend Mother. But during supper she had often noticed ire in her eyes, when the voices became too loud, and she hammered on the table with her wooden gavel to restore order. At such times she was aware that Mother Espiritu possessed a temper like a black fire which burned within, consuming her even while she remained outwardly controlled. And when she exchanged glances with the Superior her eyes sparkled like ice in the sun and were no more sympathetic.

A lay-sister served them at meals and if guilty of any misdemeanor had, as her penance, to eat her supper off the floor in full view of the refectory. This was a penance which Pia had sometimes, in a nightmare, dreamt she had to perform. Supper was composed of bread and wine, sometimes artichokes or lettuces from the garden and nuts and figs, and in the middle of the day there was a dish part potage, part stew, not unlike the French working man's *pot-au-feu* but more highly seasoned. The food was excellent but scanty. Following this grace was repeated and they once more filed out.

After supper one of them recited the Litany of Our Lady and later came recreation which, as the evenings were now fine, was passed out of doors in the courtyard or cloistered garden.

Recreation was not an hour that Pia looked forward to unless allowed to wander alone in the kitchen garden. Here frogs and crickets took up their song, and she could enjoy the fragrance of the evening air in peace and perhaps exchange a few remarks with Hipolito. She liked to watch the fenestration of the convent take on shape as each window revealed a light and oblongs of colour appeared through the dark. It could not be said that she found the sisters "companionable." There was always a certain jealousy as to who should accompany the Reverend Mother

on her tour of the garden, which she usually settled by making it alone. Pia admired her temperance, her serenity and goodness, and above all her brain. Mother Salome too she might have cared for had the sister not been otherwise disposed toward her. Sister Amparo was always at work and the other sisters seemed equally divided between two types: those who were so intent upon saving their souls that they took little account of what passed about them; and the second or more ordinary type, the good, rather stupid sisters who went through life without an idea and were too mentally deficient to interest an intelligent and spirited girl. These sisters represented the ruck of an order, slow, faithful, painstaking.

The novices were just a group of chattering children, upsetting with foolish effusions that bored her. Pia found there was conventual "small talk" just as there had been in the world only this seemed even more banal and bore-some.

During this time John grew, developed and showed signs of soon outgrowing his environment. Pia had supposed he would be very like his father but by some untoward circumstance he seemed, day by day, to resemble her more closely, in colouring, feature and expression. He was so apparently her own flesh and blood she could never adopt him as the offspring of another and expect to convince even the most credulous.

It was on Shrove Tuesday that the blow descended.

It was now so long since Mother Salome had had her talk that Pia had given it little thought for some weeks. Judging herself immune she had gone about her business, momentarily happy when she forgot the future in the health and contentment of her boy who so far had not suffered in the conditions of his birth.

Pia had tied up her skirt and had been weeding flower beds and had gone to the dispensary for some sulphur to protect some of the delicate begonias against insects, when she was stopped in the passage by Sister Blanca. Sister Blanca was in the corridr, carrying supplies of fresh linen

that had been dried over the lavender bushes and were fragrant of its flowers. Her manner was strangely excited.

"You are wanted at once, Maria Pia," she said. "I've just been to your cell."

"By whom?"

"The Reverend Mother. She is waiting for you in her sitting-room. There are visitors in the parlor."

"Visitors?"

"Yes."

"Who are they?"

"I don't know. How should I? They are two men."

Pia's heart fell.

What two men out of all the world had come to see her, she could not imagine. Yet she scented catastrophe. It was useless to ask Sister Blanca to describe, for beyond the fact of their being men the simple lay sister was useless as expositor. Pia had the shrewdness to make her way to Mother Espiritu's sitting-room through the garden and so avoid passing the open parlour door.

The Prioress was not in the habit of being kept waiting; there was no time for her to formulate any plan. It was Jordan Buel who had come for her, probably with his lawyer. She did not feel that Mr. Buel was a particularly formidable opponent. And if he thought to force her to leave the convent he would find her will as indomitable as his own. With this thought Pia tapped on the Prioress's door who bade her enter.

The perfect order of her sitting-room had a calming effect upon Helena. Nothing could go wrong, it seemed to her, in surroundings of such spotless disposition. There were bowls on her writing-table filled with rose petals gathered from last summer which gave out a faint scent, and on the ledge of the open window was an apple stuck with cloves which added spice to the current of air that crept in from the garden.

Mother Espiritu remained motionless, her repose scarcely less than that of the plaster Virgin.

"Come in my daughter," she said.

Pia closed the door behind her obediently and advanced to the centre of the room. Though her face was resolute her eyes suggested fright.

"There are two men here who wish to speak to you."

"To me?"

"Yes."

"But I think you know, mother, that I do not wish to see anyone from the world."

"I know, my dear. But this is different. Mother Salome tells me they are detectives. They are searching for a young woman who is lost in the world. But what is the matter?"

It was the expression of blind terror that crossed Pia's face that made the Superior pause. Her nerves had tricked her. Her resistance was gone.

"Sit down, my dear."

She indicated the chair before her. Pia's knees were no longer able to support her. She had risen early that morning, her breakfast had been of the slightest, and part of the night had been passed in prayer. In the Order of the Perpetual Adoration, someone of the sisters was always at prayer in the chapel, in which way the continuous supplication had not been broken in over a hundred years. And of late Pia had taken her place with the others, often rising at midnight to relieve a sister who had prayed through the earlier hours.

The Reverend Mother watched her shrewdly now as she spoke, her eyes unfathomable, her face without animation but for the slightly moving lips.

"The detectives have received permission to investigate the convents of Spain. The country, only too anxious to lift any impression of complicity, has allowed them to make positive that the young woman is not hidden. They have already seen everyone in the Convent but you, my daughter."

There was a pause. Maria Pia moistened her lips. She was about to say something and then decided it was useless. The room was revolving about her. She supposed that these

were men anxious to win her father's reward and she had always fancied the sanctity of the cloister was unassailable against investigation.

At length she broke out:

"This is Mother Salome's doing. She has never liked me. She has attempted in other ways to bring about my removal. But they were not effectual and so she has taken more drastic steps."

"My daughter, your attack upon Mother Salome is totally without provocation, and I cannot allow you to make any such remarks upon so excellent and blameless a member of our order. Mother Salome is in no way connected with the visit of the detectives."

"Then why have they come here?"

"I can't answer for that."

"But Mother Salome has seen them?"

"Certainly, at my request. All of the sisters have been summoned and appeared in the parlour before them. You are the only one they have not seen. They are looking for an American girl who is thought to have been stolen."

"Of course. And Mother Salome has told them there's one here who corresponds to their descriptions. She has given me away to them. It's unjust. It's . . . it's criminal. For months I've done the very best that I could to serve God and maintain the dignity of the order. I worked and prayed. I have fasted with the others. There isn't a rule I haven't followed no matter how hard it came. Do you think Mother Salome noticed? If she did it only irritated her. She thinks I'm different from the others and she wants me to go. I've always known that was her real disposition and that we were enemies from the very first. Hatred is evil enough from me, but how much worse is it in a sister of professed vows?"

"I shall exact penance from you for such wicked thoughts, Maria Pia, and for your unrestrained speech. You must remember where you are. I don't allow such charges. Mother Salome has told them nothing. They know the sisters and the novices only by their names in the order, not

those in the world. They do not know there is an American girl here yet. But they are waiting for you there, in the parlour. They will not leave until they have seen you. So go in to them now."

Her voice as she spoke was colder than Pia had ever known it and each word possessed an edge. And the expression of her eyes, which had seemed veiled upon her entrance, now glowed. There was a slight colour in her cheeks, the pale flame of anger. She knew that by her uncertain temper she had accomplished nothing except that she had turned the Prioress against her. She and Mother Salome were not closely attuned and the latter was jealous of the Prioress's power, but the Reverend Mother, if cold, was at least just and she would permit no abuse.

Pia held to the back of the chair; she cast an appealing glance at the Superior, but her eyes were on the ivory crucifix and she knew she could obtain no comfort. She had, at different times during the past two years of her incarceration, expected this to happen and now at last she was found out. She managed to pull herself to her feet. She steadied herself against the physical whirling that was reflected in her brain. Her head seemed light and bloodless. She felt all at once as immaterial as a feather.

It was her hour. She would face it. She was saying good-bye to everything a decent woman cherishes. Reticence, anonymity, the pleasures of a retired and respected life would be cabled to the uttermost quarters of the globe. She was to be established as notorious, infamous, peccant. If that was the order she would take her lashings with her head up. With her eyes raised, her underlip held firm against her teeth, she crossed the room, placed her hand on the knob and turned it.

"Stop!"

It was the Reverend Mother who spoke.

For a moment she remained irresolute. Then she turned. The Prioress had risen, the expression on her face was one she had never seen before. Her swift dexterous fingers had torn at her habit, unbuttoning the neck band, loosening the

cord about her waist. While Maria Pia remained stunned the Prioress had removed the black habit, her scapular and veil.

"Be quick," she said as Pia stood motionless watching her. "Give me your dress and cap. And put on mine."

"But Reverend Mother," Pia repeated aghast.

"Don't speak. Obey me."

Silently she unbuttoned Pia's dress. A moment later she had assumed it and covered her head with the cap. Pia, understanding at last her intentions, lay hold of the discarded habit with the reverend hands of a sinner allowed to touch a divine relic.

"Go into the chapel. Remain at prayer before the altar until I give my consent for you to leave."

Without another word Mother Espiritu opened the door that admitted to the convent parlour and went in to face the questions of the American detective and his interpreter.

In the chapel Pia threw herself upon the altar steps and broke into a torrent of tears. She felt utterly unworthy of the sacrifice which the Reverend Mother was making. For her sake this saintly woman, who had never lied in her life, was repudiating her position. She who for many years had held to the Strict Observance, and who had not conversed with any man of the world except through a grating while she remained unseen, was now answering their questions and answering them untruthfully. Knowing the Reverend Mother's abhorrence of lies, she wondered what penance she could ever do that would satisfy her against her present action. She had the temperament of a cenobite and, finding her own order too relaxed to satisfy her aspiring spirit, she had inflicted upon herself observances followed only by the Discalced Carmelites, even while she had advised the sisters not to follow her example. And it was she who, renouncing her clothing for the dress of the world, now stood before the detectives and endeavored to satisfy their curiosity.

Pia remained shaken by emotion. The reaction which had set in was so strong that she already regretted the Su-

perior's sacrifice. She knew the Prioress would attempt to atone for her deed for months to come with abstinence and mortification. The objective of years she felt had been swept away by these lies, and from the depths of her harassed soul Pia cried out:

"Amiable Mother, help to make me worthy of this great and undeserved sacrifice. Help me never to forget in the years to come this action of the saintly mother. May I never again be unhappy and dissatisfied or irreligious who have received so great a proof of love, affection and selflessness. Twice has the Reverend Mother saved me from disgrace, and may I, by becoming worthy of her action, repay her, however poorly, for her goodness, sanctity and saintliness. Never again shall I doubt the power of religion or speak with impatience of those who consecrate their lives to God."

She remained prostrate on the altar steps, her sobs diminishing, her entire consciousness abased. She did not lift her head, and though words had left her, her prayer continued in the force of her oblation, that was now expressed in palpitant waves of thankfulness that thrilled. Had the Reverend Mother asked her then to take the vows she would have done so without objection.

At that moment steps were heard outside on the stone floor. It was the Prioress with the detective and the Spanish interpreter.

"We have seen all the inmates of the convent now?"

"All."

Pia realised they were watching her and did not move.

"And you can swear that the American girl is not among them?"

"Naturally I swear to nothing. You have seen them all. If you have not found her she cannot be here."

"May I speak to the Superior?"

"No. She is at prayer as you see and is not to be disturbed. If I can be of no further service to you, you will excuse me."

"Thank you, sister. The American says he is very sorry to have troubled you. Good day."

"Good day."

Pia did not raise her head until she felt the Prioress's hand upon her shoulder. Then she rose swiftly, made her way across the passage to Mother Espiri's sitting-room.

The detectives had gone. The great moment of excitement had been passed without mishap. Pia, always impulsive and emotionally inclined, felt her eyes filling again. In a moment she was once more quivering. She threw herself on her knees and kissed the Prioress's hand while covering it with scalding tears.

"Reverend Mother—how can I repay you?"

"By thrusting hate out of your heart, my child. By being utterly ashamed of your wicked tongue and your remarks about Mother Salome. She has never been what you say but a zealous server of the Lord."

"I'll ask her pardon."

"It is not necessary. Merely learn to pray."

"I'll take my vows whenever you wish, Reverend Mother."

"Not for the present. Now rise. And put on your dress."

The Prioress had disengaged her hand from Pia's fervent grip and removed her garments with a certain distaste as though she could not reclaim her own clothing quickly enough. As she stepped out of it in her sleeved camisole cut modestly high in the neck, Pia looked with pity at the beauty of bared throat. The line was pure white and without break where the neck gained the shoulder, and the small, beautifully formed head, little ears and clear, ascetic profile now seen in their beauty for the first time. The Prioress appeared oddly shy and like a school-girl under Pia's scrutiny, ashamed of her thick hair, now mutilated, cut short to her head and turning the color of wood ashes.

Pia remembered what Hipolito, the half-witted gardener, had told her, that Mother Espiritu was of the aristocracy of Spain and belonged to one of its proudest fami-

lies. She had entered the convent as a girl and taken the heaviest vows. Pia had once asked Sister Amparo if this were so and she had told her it was an unwritten law of the convent never to speak the name by which one was known in the world, or to give any information about one of the sisterhood. Mother Espiritu was Mother Espiritu and that was all that one need know.

As she watched the Prioress assume her clothing she knew the gardener's speech was more than possible. He had said she was a Duquessa. And Pia had at all times been aware of the woman of breeding as well as of sanctity.

"Reverend Mother," she said, "will you tell me why you have done this thing?"

The Prioress had replaced scapular and veil and now seemed infinitely more at ease. No longer a shy woman, but one of good works, fearless, of power, with the rank of a grandee of Spain.

"I wanted to keep open the opportunity for you to go back into the world, my daughter, if possible without disgrace."

"But how—how did you know?"

The Prioress was seated before her writing-table; her dark glowing eyes looked through the suppliant before her as though through a glass, but she gave no answer. Pia had never seen a newspaper in the cloister yet she felt that Mother Espiritu had never been in doubt as to her identity.

"But why did you think I wished to return?"

"Because you have not a vocation. I would be both blind and wilful if I were to pretend you had."

"Then you do not wish me here?"

"You belong in the world."

"Mother, you understand everything. How do you read me so well?"

There was a pause. The Prioress' eyes travelled over the garden and when she answered she did not look at Pia.

"Because," she said gently, "you and I are very much alike. I have no vocation, either. I entered the convent

when very young, and having made a mistake I took oath to myself that I would not fail. I have endured years of fighting, but the Lord has listened to me and for some time now I have been resigned to the life. I pray and strive never to be one of the indolent members of the order, and when in fear of it I exercise fresh mortification of the spirit. But I wouldn't have you repeat my experience. You are younger than I am."

"But you're happy now?" Pia asked.

"I am at peace."

"I don't know how I could have permitted you to make this sacrifice, Reverend Mother. You are always going to regret it. I can't blame myself enough."

The Prioress smiled, and her expression was more heart-breaking than any tears Pia had ever seen.

"I did what seemed to me best. Every truth is not to be applauded, my daughter, and every lie is not to be punished. Now go about your offices."

Pia left the sitting-room, feeling numb as though every portion of her body had been exposed to a merciless flagellation. She remained at once the most humble and painstaking aspirant of the order.

To Pia, who was easily encouraged, it seemed that having won the partisanship of Mother Espiritu that life in the cloister would not be so difficult to endure. It had been the total absence of companionship or distraction heretofore that had palled. But since she had so intelligent and sympathetic a friend time would pass rapidly.

When the day of celebrating the Mass of Saint Trinidad arrived Pia thought to speak to Mother Espiritu following vespers. She had not seen the Superior since Shrove Tuesday to speak to and she regretted having no further words about what had passed. At vespers they followed the office of Saint Trinidad which began with psalm, lesson and hymn, followed by a Canticle, prayer and responsory. Mother Espiritu's voice while intoning was warm, a deep contralto, and the plain chant delivered by Mother Salome was in her high unmelodic voice. When it was over they

filed out two by two. As Pia passed the Reverend Mother she hesitated and the Superior's eyes rested on her. But her face was totally without expression; Pia had often seen it before, the eyes without recognition. She passed by without even a sign of having known her and Pia realised that any dreams of companionship which she had entertained were fruitless. For a moment only Mother Espiritu had raised her veil and the Prioress and the applicant had been women together. That moment had passed and would not return. In the future Maria Pia would be in no way separated from the others, merely one of the flock striving for soul's salvation.

Dissatisfied and still unconvinced Pia strove to attract the Prioress to her again by adding to her duties. She studied needlework diligently, continued her care in the garden, plucking the most beautiful blooms and arranging the altar vases. Surely Mother Espiritu saw the difference in her assembling of bouquets to those tight little withered nosegays which Sister Blanca plucked. But if she did she gave no sign of approval and Pia, who lacked constancy and concentration unless they called forth some form of approbation, became tired and once more relapsed into listlessness.

The confines of conventual life became more rigid and irksome. Her thoughts strayed more frequently to the idea of freedom and independence. The occasional letters from her family which were all she encouraged were now read with ever increasing avidity. But when her restless spirit was in its most recalcitrant mood she could think of John playing at her feet and realise the obstacle to freedom. There was no return to the world possible for her with John, now that his resemblance was branded in every feature. And without him the world would be a wilderness. At such times the realisation of her entrapment was complete.

She had come that afternoon to the convent graveyard and looked at the neat little mounds, not unlike the narrow, uncomfortable beds within, each spread with a coverlet of sod. Yes, this was where she would one day be laid to

rest when her disobedient and reckless spirit was at last curbed forever. She sat down on one of the mounds with her arm around John, her mind straying back to the past, as she had for some time since ceased to look into the future. It was just a question now how long before she yielded to this inner battle and admitted herself conquered.

With tear-filled eyes she cried impatiently: "I don't regret it! I don't regret it!" and tightened her hold upon her son as though in that way to ask his forgiveness for the gifts that had been withheld him. She remained until sunset, then recalling her duties she made her way back to her cell. In her room she threw herself before the brass crucifix murmuring:

"Miserere mei, Domine."

XXXIV

THE sister's voice from behind her impenetrable veil continued even, monotonous, deliberative. Half-formulated hopes, urgent, clamorous, claimed Sefton's mind; made him wish to know only certain facts, but the emotionless voice was not interrupted, and he allowed her to go on until she reached a full stop.

"You don't mean," he cried, "that Miss Cass has become one of the order?"

She hesitated, as though unaccustomed to replying to questions. But presently she answered.

"No, I don't mean that."

"She's alive?"

"Yes."

"Then can she be told at once that I am here. If she refuses to see me I will admit myself defeated. Of course, her first impulse will be to refuse. But if you tell her my reasons for coming, that will make a difference. And, after all," he added, "I know the only thing you wish for her is happiness."

"Yes, I wish only happiness for her."

"Then will my message be sent at once?"

"No, not at once."

"And why not?"

"She is no longer here."

"Miss Cass has left the convent?"

"Yes, six months ago."

"Is she married?"

The sister shook her head. Before those in the order she might be severe. Sefton felt indisputably that she would be, but in the company of those of the world she was almost humble.

"Tell me where she is now."

"I can't do so without permission."

She rose and left the room, to consult Mother Espiritu, he supposed. He began to pace the little parlour. He moved to the window and looked out, and then back to the door. A moment later, hearing the sister's heavy footsteps in her rope sandals, he seated himself before her bulk filled the door. She removed a strip of paper from her sleeve and mutely offered it to him. In a delicate and exact hand, an address had been traced across it, the ink blotted with coloured sand. He read: "Señora Rosita Guzman y Morales, Calle Major, San Anselmo, Huesca."

"What name is this?" he asked.

"The señorita is known under that name at present."

For a moment he doubted if there had not been some mistake. Was this one more cul-de-sac, on which he was embarking after so many weeks of suspense and disappointment? Could Rosita be Miss Cass? He consulted the paper once more. Suddenly it seemed more likely. Helena's fine sense of histrionics would not permit her to take an undistinguished name, and there was irony in this choice.

"Whom have I to thank for this intervention?"

The sister lowered her head slightly.

"*No importa*," she replied.

"But it is to me," he averred. "It makes all the difference in the world. You have been a friend to Miss Cass, and to me in putting all thoughts of creed and your order aside and thinking only of our future. Can't I know your name?"

She shook her head. He knew that keeping their identities unacknowledged by the world was one of the regulations, but he felt that her mind, curiously non-subjective, was embarrassed by any direct appeal.

"Whom shall I thank?" he asked.

"*Jesù, María y José*," she said simply.

He put his hand in his pocket, removed some bills, and placed them on the parlour table. He saw as he made this

gesture that her hands met within her loose sleeves. He thought she was about to refuse his present.

"I hope this will be of some use to the order," he said. "If all goes well this is not the last time you will hear from me. It can be used for charity, or as you wish."

The sister rang the silver bell again and the portress appeared. She spoke to her a moment in an undertone. Sister Natividad went away and returned carrying a coloured drink in a thick tumbler on a tray. She offered it to the stranger.

"You will have a warm journey before you," the sister said by way of invitation.

Sefton accepted the glass, drank the *tisane* obediently but without pleasure and then replaced it on the table.

"May Mary Most Pure guard you," she said.

Then he turned and followed Sister Natividad to the door, she unlatched it, and he stepped out from the cool twilight into the dazzling sun of early afternoon.

On his way back to the village Sefton speculated on the identity of the sister who had remained kindly, inflexible and anonymous. Of course she had not been the prioress, so to whom had he spoken? In a moment he realised that beyond doubt she was Mother Salome. No one else would have made the statements she had to her own detriment. It would have been an act of disloyalty not easily condoned upon the part of another sister. And at this explanation he marvelled at the austerity of these lonely women in their self-immolation, so kindly in their attitude toward their devotions, so pitiless in their flagellation of their own pride. She had humiliated herself toward a stranger as a means of penance for past sins.

He explained to the friendly innkeeper his need of leaving Trinidad at once. He and all his family escorted him to the door and stood there waving farewell as he was driven away. An hour later he had boarded the train which was carrying him to Lila.

It was one early afternoon that Sefton obtained his first glimpse of San Anselmo. The hill town had fastened it-

self upon the flank of the mountain, finding a foothold on its precipitous side like the depository of some nest which a courageous yet wary bird had attempted to conceal. The lower reaches were cultivated with olives, the trees centuries old, their thick stems twisted and interlaced, each crowned with silky grey verdure. They grew in irregular ranks, covering the inclines with undulations of a single tone of grey in which the brilliant afternoon sunlight wavered in folds of heat.

Sefton put down his field-glasses after a moment's scrutiny and contented himself with seeing only what the eye took in unaided. This was the experience of a lifetime, and, in spite of the thrumming excitement, he felt the elation of the connoisseur of life who quaffs slowly that he may savour every mouthful. The carter addressed occasional monosyllables to his *burro*, as they rattled over the carelessly paved road in their bobbing *tartana*.

Lush grass grew rank on each side of the roadway and the slopes were spread with broom and yellow gorse and before them raced a stream from the snow-covered Pyrenees. As they approached the bridge which spanned the hurrying water, Sefton noticed Arabic characters still decipherable in the arch. He found himself wondering how much of the engineering done in his own country would remain intact after centuries of use.

* After a few minutes they drew up in the shadow of a tamarind tree; the peasant felt beneath the seat for the wine skin, and, after offering it to the traveller, took a deep draught.

"Holy Mother!" he cried to the sweating burro. "Would you have me draw you, myself. . . . *Anda burro.*" . . .

And they continued an unhurried pace. His jubilation was not to be contained. The certainty that he was about to see Helena increased with every half-mile. Nowhere could anyone be safer from detection, since even the dialect spoken was unintelligible to one understanding only Castilian. The nearest train was a journey of several miles distance. Strangers never came here, though it was one

of the loveliest corners of Spain, with its history of Iberian, Roman and Arabic occupation; traits of each race had left their stamp upon the present people, charming and unspoilt by any contact with European civilization. The town of San Anselmo was to be found only in the largest and most detailed maps; as none of the roads were practicable for touring, the chances were the best that she might remain unmolested the rest of her life.

During the last half hour, while the little *burro* struggled with his load, Sefton's impressions took hold of him. On the various levels stretching up to the barren heights crowned by a ruined castle were clustered white walls and jumbled tiled roofs, the spire of its church lifted serenely in their midst. Occasionally a weather-stained house detached itself from its more cleanly neighbours, where the walls looked like musty rinds of cheese. Without the town trees clung everywhere to the mountain-side and grapevines threw out tendrils at support wherever a trellis was lacking.

On either side of the gateway were mammoth fig trees casting grateful pools of shade. Here they were stopped by the *octoi* to make certain they were not attempting to carry dutiable provisions within. This proved a mere form, however, and Sefton's word was sufficient proof that he was admissible without having his bag opened.

The *niño*, who ran out of the *fonda* where they were directed, made fast two mules harnessed to a *carreta* that plunged and snorted at the *burro*. They showed vicious teeth and tossed their heads under straw hats pierced by their long, fuzzy ears. After the carter had seen to it that they were unable to do his little animal any injury, he followed the child into the *fonda*, acting as interpreter for Sefton, arranged for his pensionnaire, received his money and was gone.

After being refreshed, Sefton threw himself upon the alcove bed in his half-darkened room and lay there thinking. Through the partially shuttered windows that opened onto a diminutive balcony a breeze was stirring. The cool

air proved the sun was on the decline. He lay waiting for the time when he could go safely in search of Helena. In a few hours he would be talking to her, and all the mysteries and vicissitudes of four years would be laid bare. The excitement of the moment was not to be curbed by its unreality.

That evening he inquired where the Señora Guzman lived, and at his question was treated with added respect as one belonging to the *gente de razon*. He set out in search of the house and in a few minutes found what he judged to be it, in the angle of two irregular streets forming a gore. The house, which appeared to be very old, was set back from the street and protected by a wall with an arched wicket-gate. Even in the failing light he could see its surface was not lime-washed like the others, but a pale mauve to harmonise with the polychrome tiles and to form a contrast for its flowers. He sniffed the orange-blossoms which assailed him and plucked a bansia rose from the unruly tangle that thrust branches cascading with bloom over the wall.

He remained leaning on the wicket-gate, watching the lighted windows discreetly curtained. For a moment he felt a prompting to enter at once and demand to see her, but this feeling was choked down. He must take his time and use discretion now that he had reached his journey's end. In the darkness Sefton heard someone at work in the garden with a watering-pot and, afraid of attracting attention, moved on with a contraction at his heart. Was it possible that only a garden wall separated him from the mythical Helena Cass? Could it be that after months devoted to search, she had been there all that time, unconscious of his tumult—of his actual existence.

On his way back to the *fonda* he asked himself if that person in shadow could have been she? Or had the *niño* misdirected him? The desire to see her at once now claimed him to the exclusion of all other thoughts. He had intended not to present himself at her door until noon,

but at eleven o'clock next morning, after a sleepless night, the suspense had to be ended.

He returned to the wicket of the night before and rang the bell. A broad-busted, comely serving-woman, her sleek dark hair in place, answered his ring. As she came down the garden walk he noticed the worn flagging had been planted with grass, so that a border of fresh green outlined each stone, giving the effect of a vast quilt spread for one to walk on.

"Whom do you wish to see?" the young woman asked, surprised to find a stranger, but nevertheless matter-of-fact.

"The Señora Guzman."

The woman was about to make the reply that she would see if the señora was at home, when he interrupted her.

"There she is now," he said. "I will speak to her."

And, pushing by the servant, he went up the walk to the house, where he had caught a glimpse of a lady standing under the portico at the door half hidden in vines. He had approached without her hearing him, when suddenly she turned and they confronted each other.

It was Helena Cass. He told himself he would have known her anywhere. The amazing vitality of her eyes, her entire personality changed, and yet essentially the same. Out-of-door life, regular duties, the invigorating air, had hardened her skin like the firing of some splendid ceramic. A slight colour, like a rare glaze, overlay her features. And the continued schooling of disappointment, obedience and sorrow had given a spiritual cast which her wilful, imperious face had always lacked.

"You are the Señora Guzman?" he asked, hat in hand. "Yes."

"May I speak to you a moment alone?" he inquired as the serving-woman approached them.

She gave a gesture that was immediately obeyed and the woman went within the house. Neither her attention nor his had relaxed while they continued to hold each other by the challenge of their eyes.

XXXV

SHE was the first to speak.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"To marry you."

She moved impatiently. The upheaval of her shoulders suggested part irritation, part insult. He was stupid to have spoken so bluntly, he thought, and then was not regretful. It was best that she know he was serious from the start.

"You must be mad. I won't do you the injustice of supposing you are attempting to be offensive."

Sefton bowed.

"Thank you," he said.

For a moment they relapsed into silence, yet neither moved. His own Castilian had been acquired by study, but there was no doubting the natural product of her speech, fluid, idiomatic, its beauty in no way marred. Nothing was more natural than that she should be mistaken for a *Madrileña*. He paused. Her face had not altered its veiled inscrutability. It could not have kept its own counsel better had she rehearsed her defense. His heart sank. Was she going to continue this farce of pretending to be someone else? He felt that before him was a maize through which he could not penetrate.

He noticed beneath a rose trellis two garden chairs, and now led the way thither. She seated herself with that apparent unconsciousness of her raiment of one who has been a nun. The artist in Sefton noticed the splendid uprightness of her body, disposed with the plastic strength yet relaxation of masterly posing. He realised that such effects were achieved without thought, yet they impressed him as the result of adroit attitudinizing.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"Certainly. You are Jay Sefton, the novelist."

He felt absurdly boyish and pleased. He wanted to throw his hat in the air, but attempted to retain his gravity.

"Do you remember where we met?"

"Wasn't it at Mrs. Spencer-Mills, in East Sixty-sixth Street? She was giving a dance that night. Am I right?"

"Of course."

"And didn't we dance together?"

"But it must be over five years ago. How do you remember me? Haven't I changed?"

"I knew you directly. And Americans never change. They merely grow older. For a person to really change presupposes altering one's point of view, and Americans never do that. They redecorate their drawing-rooms and they revise their visiting-lists, but they never by any chance change their point of view. It's the only thing they inherit and pass on."

She spoke with a concentrated bitterness in which every word was like some poisonous essence. At that moment a small boy ran on sturdy legs around the angle of the house, observed the stranger for the first time, and then disappeared from shyness.

"What is it, Juan?" she called.

But the child did not answer. Sefton was conscious that a moment of tension had arrived, and since she did not speak, he continued:

"You don't ask how I found you?"

"I rather make a point of never asking questions. I think people always tell you what they really want you to know."

When he finished his recital of the months he spent in tracing her, of his various encounters and of the perpetual impasse into which he was being thrust, her expression changed slightly. Her only comment was:

"You have put yourself to an immense amount of trouble. All that time could have been utilized to better result if you'd written another book."

"I felt I could never write again until I found you."

"Your courtesy even outdoes the Spaniard."

"But I am sincere."

"Don't be tiresome."

Her voice was without reproof and yet without spontaneity. He studied her seeming apathy. Indifference, he admitted shamefacedly, was one of the charms which always roused him. He noticed the listless patrician foot in a distinctly worldly slipper, which protruded from under her well-made dress. Such simple authoritative clothes were not run up by any mountain dressmaker. There was no doubt that she was in communication with Paris or Madrid. He supposed that upon occasions she wished to array herself for her own satisfaction, to realise she was still young and that during the passing years she had been an economist with her looks.

While they remained there the serving-woman prepared a lunch table and now announced its readiness out-of-doors. Sefton rose, but at his expression of frank disappointment she relented.

"Will you join us?" she asked. "My only stipulations are that you don't forget my Spanish name. And, of course, you won't say any more of those silly things."

She went away and returned presently with Juan at her side. Her lips were parted a moment before she spoke. She was watching him levelly without change of expression. Then she said quite simply:

"This is my little boy, Mr. Sefton."

"How are you, young man?" he asked in Spanish.

The child bowed ceremoniously over his hand.

"I am very well, thank you, señor," he said. "You are kind to ask. May I hope that your own health is good?"

"*Estoy bien, gracias,*" he replied.

The stone paving where they sat was so irregular that a wedge of paper was placed under one leg to keep the lunch-table steady. A great rose tree that climbed one side of the house formed the only protection between them and the sky.

"In summer," Miss Cass remarked, seeing that his eyes

were turned upward, "the stars seemed tangled in the perfume of roses."

"Does your boy know any English?" he asked, as the child remained absolutely silent.

"Only the Lord's Prayer," was her somewhat astonishing answer. "As a Spanish woman my knowing English would be rather unusual, and Juan, you see, who talks freely with the villagers, cannot tell what he does not know. For the most part my neighbours are industrious, incurious, kind-hearted and very able people. But gossip is always a trait of the human species, and I try to give it no soil in which to flourish. Later, when Juan is older and can be reasoned with, I shall teach him English."

"You speak as though you were planning to remain here for years?"

"I think my life has given you opportunities for the observation that it is rather useless to plan. I shall be quite happy, however, if allowed to remain here unmolested."

"But it's unthinkable. A woman of your brain. . . . Aren't you ever homesick for America?"

"Let's not talk about that."

Serephina had entered bearing a plate of ham cooked in sherry. Their lunch consisted of fried *tortillas*, *orujo* paste, a dish described as "widowed" rice, a bottle of val de Penas, with juniper preserve and fig marmalade. While they ate, a full blown rose overhead in a current of air lodged a volley of red petals upon them. Two of the petals remained balanced in the great architectural mass of Miss Cass's dark hair.

Luncheon over, Juan ran away to play in the back garden, while she took her guest to show him the prospect from the garden wall. Carefully tended borders of freesias in bloom held back an encroachment of phloxes, love-lies-ableeding and stars of cyclamen. He noticed the orange tree, whose fragrance he had been aware of the night before, with its branches of ripening fruit and wax-like bloom. Whither she led him acacias overhung the wall, each branch laden with a decoration of balls of golden chenille

that covered the paved street beneath with a yellow shadow of particles of bloom and fallen pollen. The scent in the heat of early afternoon was passionate, heady, like entering the distillery of some famous *parfumerie*.

Beneath them were lower levels of the town and from where they stood they saw in the dwindling perspective tile roofs and clustered chimney pots. A swale of olives bound them in and still further was the wild growth of the *vega*. Straggling hamlets were built along burning white roads that seared the eyes like powdered lime in the sunlight. Purple vapours rose, clothing the distance to great heights beyond which were the summits in perpetual snow. The effect of man assisting nature, but never destroying, impressed Sefton. Villages constructed at just such angles to add depth to the precipitous drop below, or stretching on shelving uplands to break monotony without disturbing streams or depredating woods. The colour and variety seemed the planning of some master artist.

"Did you ever breathe such air?" she asked jealously, as he remained silent. "The Palisades scarcely challenge comparison with my view. Or do I overestimate our charms?"

"These are castles in Spain. But New York is New York. Why this bitterness about home?"

"I'm not bitter. Only don't you see I am doomed to remain here all the rest of my life?"

"Are you so miserable?"

"No," she said defiantly, "I'm not miserable. But how I despise the sanctimonious, hypocritical point of view at home that makes it impossible for me ever to go back. I hadn't even thought of that until seeing you to-day. You are making me remember all the things I had schooled myself to forget. I thought I'd been successful."

"But you're not?"

He saw the quiver in her throat. It came and went as though she were drinking rapidly. He thought at that moment he would give anything in the world to put his lips there to that spot.

She calmed herself, though her eyes still glistened.

"Tell me about mother and Annis. Have you seen them? How does mother look? And how is poor Annis . . .?"

That moment had brought about the complete displacement of all pretenses. She listened painfully to his recital of encountering Mrs. Cass at the opera, absorbing each word as he described his visit to East Eightieth Street. He told of her mother's appearance as he had seen her, truthfully, inexorably; her black dress, her inimical manner. When he had finished she asked him abruptly to leave.

"I must think," she said. "I can't see you any more to-day."

He went away humbly, yet jubilant. She had refused to see him any more for the present, which he construed to mean that he might come the following day. Yet he counselled reserve and attempted to ignore her for a couple of days, spending the interval in investigating the village and the old cemetery. He found there the dead were shelved in walls like bales of merchandise for periods of years, and deciphered dates that should have made him feel callow and unsubstantial. All that it really achieved was to make him realise just how bitter the punishment was which he had set for himself.

Returning three days later he found her seated in the garden with some embroidery stretched on a drum which she had laid aside since the light had begun to fail. The air had grown cooler and she had drawn a Manila shawl about her shoulders. She seemed resolutely determined not to recall their moments of intimacy since no reference was made to home or any previous state. He was a tripper and she was a resident of San Anselmo. Serephina placed a lamp in the window and the light fell athwart the flagging where they were seated, Miss Cass with Juan at her side. Sefton recrossed his legs and leaned back in the deep garden chair, and decided to make the plunge.

"I want to talk about yourself and, unless you're unwilling, your outlook on the future. . . ."

She gave a slight, embittered laugh.

"My future is a very uncertain matter. I am likely not

to have any at all, or else an altogether too exuberant one. I am destined to live in rat-holes all the rest of my life."

"How can you stand it?"

She sat with averted eyes for several minutes watching the brooding shadows of her garden. She remained irresponsible while she appeared to struggle with a strong disinclination to speak. Then with a sudden uprush of feeling she stiffened to the necessity of some explanation.

"Of course I know I can trust you," she said. "When you leave you won't mention having seen me."

"Naturally."

"I can stand it because I must. I couldn't have done it once. Now I am able to face whatever confronts me. I've lived so much alone I think I've given more time to metaphysics than most people. Many of the hours at the convent available for prayer I spent in thought. They weren't wasted, for I've devised for my own needs a sort of quasi-religious philosophy. There was a time when I was not a very highly sensitized instrument. But I've lost whatever vanity I had and all thought of my own importance. As an ego I have just enough impulse to keep on living."

She put her arm protectingly around the little boy seated at her side. The child had been quite unnaturally quiet. He hadn't spoken or squirmed. Sefton had paid little attention to Juan, feeling the less he was reminded of the boy's existence the less his fastidiousness would be offended. He wanted to forget what had taken place, not to have it recalled by the child's well-knit frame, the developed shoulders and chest of his splendid little body. He was dark, with thick, rebellious hair, alert eyes and a firm mouth and jaw. And yet, in spite of the rather absurd self-reliance in one so young, there was something wistful about the little fellow. He responded to his mother's touch with a double willingness, because she was both father and mother to him, his great playfellow and companion, his chief contact with life.

"My experience has taught me this," she resumed, "what

is wrong for one is not necessarily wrong for another. There is no hard and fast law that can be applied to all. I know this would seem to be a sinner's code of ethics, and of course it is. But this I know. . . ."

And as she spoke her eyes were vitalized by the expressing in words of thoughts that had often come to her but remained dormant because of no listener. "The important thing in life is not that one sins, but the effect that one's sin has upon one. Sin isn't sin unless the results are sinful. What I have done and decried has made of me a . . . woman. I wasn't even a human being before."

Sefton felt himself curiously stirred by her words. Her life seemed to have woven itself like some strangely wrought pattern into a great theme in music. Out of her wrong-doing she had made for herself a working code. Sin had brought her face to face with this stimulus, this reconstruction of evil into good. The important thing in life is not that one sins, but the effect that one's sin has upon one. It was a world message. Her entire existence seemed to him a translation of this tenet.

"I was absurdly ignorant considering my age and experience. Emotionally, I was underfed. I had felt nothing. I was spoiled, indulged, immature. I disregarded my mother, my family, my friends, and I contrived to shirk every responsibility. To-day there is no one to do anything for me, and I am responsible, not only for myself, but another. Every word I speak, every step I take endangers the future liberty of someone else. You see in this little man beside me my one worthy feature. . . . He's kept me from under the wheels of the train, . . . He's kept me from throwing myself into the sea. . . . It's my wrong-doing that has given me all the courage I possess, and all the charity . . . and I believe all the poetry, too. And so, if you ask me if I am ashamed of my past, I can only tell you that I am very proud of it. For had it not been for that I think I might have been a deliberately evil woman, as I was then in the making . . . and as it is, I believe I am a reasonably good one. . . ."

"Of course you're good," he said heatedly. "Your sin—since you persist in the old vocabulary . . . is that you loved an unworthy man too much—Surely I am enough of an American to know that the woman who loves too much is more admirable than the woman who does not love enough. Too many men have been the victims of the latter kind of women. And even her greatest admirers will admit that loving is not our countrywoman's strongest point."

He watched her, silent, gestureless, the repose and perfect poise of her bearing holding him. Then he went on:

"Small feeling, I suppose, enters all the virtues. And a woman who retains her chastity may be equally compounded of avarice and lack of imagination. At least the person who is always considering the costs gradually loses the currency of payment. Your 'sin,' as you call it, isn't apparent to me, because I'm in love with you and always shall be."

Her head was thrust back against the wall. She was watching the stars through the rose trellis.

"You intend to be sincere," she said judicially as though attempting to weigh each word, "but you're not. You think your interest in me is permanent. It isn't. You're a novelist, subtle, imaginative, looking for a new type. To you I'm a subject, a wayward, rather impressionistic study. With me for a lay figure I don't doubt you could develop something very interesting . . . it wouldn't be me, but it would be eminently readable. I think you will admit that is all that you came for, to refresh your impression of me so that you can continue work."

He felt himself flush in the darkness. The thought of making use of her misfortune had been discarded months since, and yet there had been a time when it was the propelling motive that had goaded him into search. He hesitated a moment, looking down at his well-made boots.

"I am asking you to be my wife," he said quietly.

"But I don't love you."

"Of course I know that, but as my wife you will no longer be penalized for past heresies. You can return to America . . . free. I will look after the little man. I'm

not poor. I have a position of a kind, and I'll exact nothing from you that you don't give willingly. More than that, I feel tremendous potentialities within me. I feel I'm going to do good work, great work. I don't say this crassly, but as the wife of a famous novelist, should I become one, your place will be secure. I am telling you this, because there is no one else to say it for me. It isn't cowardice that's keeping you here, but the pride of your family. Well—this would put an end to all the furtiveness I hate. . . What do you say?"

"My friend . . . I will never make use of you or any other man for a selfish purpose. If I ever marry it will be for the simple pleasure of being my husband's wife. . . . No other question will enter into the relation."

She sat with her shawl drawn about Juan. Looking down upon the tired child she noticed he had fallen asleep. She rose, lifting him in her arms without waking him.

"I must go in," she said. "Juan is very tired."

"Helena . . . I shall never leave San Anselmo until you marry me."

He stood close beside her, and at his words she became instantly remote, rigid, impossible to appeal to. He watched the active pupils of her eyes, clear, unwavering, that, as they glittered in her warmly tinted face, seemed compounded of both colour and light.

"Mr. Sefton," she said mockingly, "I think your discretion as a novelist won't permit you to carry any situation too far. Good night."

Days followed this encounter before he returned to her. Several times he passed Serephina in the street so that he knew her mistress was still apprised of his whereabouts. Since it was patent to her that he was remaining on her account, it was childish in him to forego the pleasure of seeing her. Before the week was up he returned at her dinner hour. Prandial preparations were going forward in which an appetite perpetually sharpened became acute as he sniffed the delights of Serephina's kitchen. He was asked to remain and accepted with scant urging. A week of un-

usual warmth had brought out all the roses of the trellis and the flagging beneath was spattered with their blood-red petals.

They were in the midst of their meal when they heard suddenly the sound of a nearby guitar. An old man, a wandering *guitarrero*, was standing at the wicket-gate. His eyes danced in his withered face, as the rhythm, which is the soul of the Spaniard, maintained its lilt in emphasised time. For a moment they were amazed that so much music could be urged from his battered instrument. Then Miss Cass called Serephina and gave instructions that the *guitarrero* should be fed.

"One rarely sees one of these players in this part of Spain. The man has probably come on foot from the south."

He was urged to enter the garden and he removed his tattered hat with a graceful gesture and drew up his thin bent body in an attitude of respectful attention. He had plucked a red rose, which he placed behind his ear.

"Beautiful lady," he said, "I play only for my own enjoyment and to give pleasure. Since I see you and the *caballero* are occupied I will not discommode you further."

The old man made as if to leave, when Miss Cass spoke:

"As a stranger in the village will you not do me the honour to accept my hospitality? And after you have dined we should like you to play if it pleases you."

The old man smiled. The form of her courtesy was not to be withstood.

"Since it is your wish," he replied, "I cannot refuse."

Serephina led him to the kitchen and he followed, dragging his feet, the hemp soles of his sandals silent on the flagging. Later when Serephina returned to serve wine and a plate of honey cakes she rolled her eyes to heaven and gave a violent pantomime of the stranger's appetite.

Dinner over, Sefton lit his cigarette in the dusk and they remained silent scenting the acacia and watching the after-glow. They were each roused from their individual meditations presently when, the old man's hunger having been appeased, the sound of the guitar was renewed. Serephina had lighted the lamps in the sitting-room and they entered, Sefton for the first time.

He noticed the bookcase well stocked with the yellow backs of French and Spanish literature, the few pictures on the wall, the vases of glowing glaze with their apportionment of garden flowers. Helena seated herself on a wide sofa spread with a Manila shawl of vivid colours, and he threw himself into an arm-chair by the fireplace.

The *guitarrero* was led within; unabashed he selected the seat nearest the door, and, after bowing respectfully to each, began to play. Having dispatched the meal of a gastrophome, the old man plucked the strings with increased spirit, while the oscillations of his head kept time unconsciously. He played an old Moorish plaint, haunting, occasionally strident, with a monotonous wailing refrain. This was followed by a vigorous strumming, African in its intensity, suggesting the tom-toms of Algeria, all the movement and pantomime of the Arabs at some native celebration.

Sefton let his cigarette go out.

"If New York could hear such music," he ejaculated, leaving the unfinished sentence to express the violence of its acclaim.

She smiled cynically.

"It can't be heard anywhere but in Spain," she said. "This music is centuries old. It is not written even in manuscript; it cannot be bought. It has been handed down, an inheritance, among musicians, travelling players and the like. It is dying out even now. Only the ear of a composer can record it. These are just fragments, priceless records of a civilisation lost. . . ."

He did not interrupt again, as the *guitarrero* played a *Sevillana* Miss Cass had evidently heard before. She kept time, beating the floor with the heel of her slipper, while the old man's eyes sparkled and he increased its madness. As he broke into a different air, she was suddenly on her feet. She tore the Manila shawl from the sofa, hurled it about her in folds *a la Maja*, detached a carnation from a vase and fastened it in her hair. Then she opened the drawer of a table and removed a pair of castanets and adjusted them to her fingers. For a moment she stood wait-

ing while the thrill of the music, like the pumping of a heart, continued unbroken. Then she sped across the tiled floor of her room, her body half upright, but stooping so that her feet were concealed and the hem of her dress touched the floor. Wrapped in her shawl of angry chromatic colours, its Chinese yellow embroidered with mammoth roses with their green leaves, she was like some tropical flower, a red tanagra that had flown through the room.

Until that moment Sefton had doubted the wisdom of her experiment. He possessed the cautiousness of one afraid of failure and he realised that the dances of Spain should not be attempted by the well-meaning amateur. It required years if not generations of proficiency to obtain the ease and casual results of the experienced native. He realised now that during her long residence she had learnt them carefully, accurately, with the musical sense of one who loved them and the mimicry of one born an actress. She seemed motionless in her second pose, her head up, her eyes half-veiled by drooping lids, her hands behind her back snapping out the strange involuted rhythm that never escaped her. The Spaniard, he thought, was never so instinct with life, so suggestive of violence, as when seemingly static, the dancer showing throughout her person the tattoo of time, in eyes, in castanets, in the muscles of the back and torso, and the composed and restless feet. Her movements as she glided round the room were panther-like; the sharp throwing-up of the head never endangered the flower, nor did the folds of her shawl become disarranged.

There were cries from the guitarrero.

"*Muy bien . . . olé, . . . olé, . . .*"

The old man would not suffer his enjoyment to end, he had struck into another dance, a *farruca*, and in a moment she had replied to the challenge, her arms in place. This was dancing of a more vigorous if not a more difficult order. Between stamping her heels on the floor, which seemed to echo the staccato of her castanets, were rapid turns of these arabesques in which her skirt under the

drapery of her shawl spread out like a drooping flower. In spite of dizzy revolving only her feet and ankles were uncovered while she executed the amazing movements, in which each vertebræ of her neck seemed softened until her body was as flexible as the stem of a flame-coloured tulip. Throughout the performance the mask of her face remained immobile, the entire dance *entrechat* and all achieved as by some important ritualist at a solemn *fiesta*.

Sefton had watched her with increasing excitement through these convolutions as he saw the heavy coil of her hair loosening. It needed only one more rapid turn with her head thrown back and as she performed that figure there was a shower of pins on the floor and the great length of dark hair shook itself free and fell to her knees. He had seen such wealth of hair before in Spain, but never on one of his own countrywomen. Serephina entered, collected the pins, and Miss Cass without loss of countenance swiftly wound her hair up and secured it before a hand-mirror had been brought. Then she cast the Manila shawl aside and went out into the garden. Sefton followed.

"I don't know what possessed me to be so foolish this evening," she said as she stood under the acacias, leaning against the wall. "I must apologise."

The scent of the garden in the night air was strong though cool. Sefton stood close beside her, looking into the shadowed oval of her face. "I know what possessed you," he said thickly. "It was the devil. You were in a devilish mood. That's what you wanted to arouse and you've done it."

He took her face in his hands and holding it to him kissed her, raining upon her lips the determined kisses of a man who had made up his mind. She struggled to be free, but her arms were pinioned whilst he continued to slake his thirst of her. At length managing to free one arm she fought her way out of his embrace. Then turning she struck him full on the mouth with the palm of her hand. With sobbing breath she ran into the house and closed the door. A moment later he heard the lock pushed down.

All this time the music had continued its maddening gaiety as though turning into rhythm his own excited heart beats. Now it ceased abruptly as though in answer to an order.

He remained alone in the garden for several minutes and then disconsolately let himself into the street. The disk of the moon had begun to soar into the sky above the rim of the mountains. It painted the village with an artificial phosphorescent glamour. Sefton walked, not noticing where he went, only wishing to have time to think. But his thoughts far outstripped his steps. Much later he returned to the *fonda*, climbed the stairs to his room, undressed and went to bed.

But sleep did not overtake him. His bed was placed in a curtained alcove, and in the stuffiness of its enclosure his restlessness became unendurable. He rose, threw on a dressing-gown, and thrusting his bare feet into slippers walked to the open window. Cradling a cigarette in his hands he struck a match and obtained a light. . . . The air that poured into his room was cold with an edge to it, invigorating, sleep-provoking, and yet each moment his thoughts became more dominant. The moon now flooded the expanse below him with a brilliance that was tropic. The sinuosities of the narrow paved streets seemed to run molten silver and the lime-washed walls not in shadow were a harsh white. The walled-in declivities of the mountain-side beyond were planted in almond orchards in bloom and the branches of white blossom were ghostly in the moonlight. The grass beneath was spread with fallen petals like a spectral snow-storm.

As the cold Spanish night pierced his dressing-gown, Sefton did not move. The silver and whiteness of the dropping perspective as he watched seemed to intensify its impression of loveliness, to deepen its hold upon his imagination. In a moment he heard the staff of the *sereno* striking the pavements as he made his way through the streets, lantern in hand, calling out the hour and continuing an astronomical dissertation while the town slept. And mildly at a distance, forming a faint legato, came the sup-

pressed voice of the stream racing under the old Arab bridge. The romance of San Anselmo. . . . The simple pastoral beauty of its uplands. . . . The village, rectilinear, overhanging, with its glowing shadows. . . .

Chilled, but unwilling to leave the window, he realised there would never be a moon that would not suggest failure to him. He would never inhale the scent of acacia or orange blossoms without thinking of this bitterest hour of his life. He acknowledged his defeat and its humiliation. He hadn't expected Helena to remember him. But he had encouraged that unfailing support that if alive, alone and in hiding, she would accept his protection. It was only one more proof of her independence, if proof were needed, that she remained a rebel to the last. She did not love him and she disdained to put him to any use. She despised him now. More than that, she would never trust him again . . . perhaps she would not even see him. At present he was catalogued as one with Buel. . . . Yet even in his bitterness he admired her act.

He returned to bed with his mind made up. He would leave San Anselmo that day. He would be driven in the afternoon to Lila, sleep there that night and the next morning take the train returning to France. He would spend a week in Paris, and after that—he recoiled from the void which stretched before him. He realised in that moment just what he had lost—nothing mattered now.

His plans next day were not effected as summarily as he had expected. It required several hours to find a *taranta* willing to take him to Lila that day. By five o'clock, however, his kit was packed and placed behind them and he was sharing the seat beside the driver. The little *burro* was directed toward the gate of the village, where he knew he could not go without saying good-bye to Helena. He was leaving forever, and it was conceivable that he might perform some last service for her. Reaching her house he stopped the vehicle at the corner and strode to the wicket-gate. He rang the garden bell vigorously and waited. He was wearing a cap and his overcoat was carried over his

arm. Perhaps if she realised he was going away not to return she might consent to see him. In any case he knew he would not leave until she did. If necessary he would force his entrance. At length Serephina appeared.

"Will you tell Dona Rosita that the foreign gentleman is leaving Spain to-night and ask if she will see him?"

Serephina went within and he remained in the sweet-smelling garden. He looked at his watch several times. He lit a cigarette to hide his anxiety. Minutes passed without incident. Then she came out from the house and stood under the trellis. She was wearing a white dress, one he had never seen before. He wondered if she had not kept him waiting in order to change. She glanced at his overcoat.

"Serephina says you're going away."

"Yes, this is good-bye. I came to ask if you would care to send any message to your mother or sister . . . or if I could take them anything you would not care to risk by post. . . . You can trust me, really."

For a moment she did not answer. His eyes were in hers and yet he saw that her breathing was hurried, in gusts.

"Isn't this a sudden decision?"

"Not very. I made up my mind last night. I knew there was no need of my remaining. . . . Even a poor player knows when he's lost. But I shall have to hurry. My *carretero* is waiting at the corner."

"Don't go," she pleaded. "Please don't go, Jay."

She placed her hand upon his coat sleeve as though to forcibly detain him.

That was enough. He threw down his coat on the grass. His arms were around her and she no longer fought, though he could feel the tumult of her heart against his side. She was shivering. . . . It seemed to him only a minute in which the dusk fell between them like a wounded bird. He saw the garden had grown dark, and they were two shadows alone, before that exquisite panorama of unreality, and above them on the hilltop were the ruins of a castle in Spain.

THE END

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